

The Organizational Hierarchy of the Bābīs during the period of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's residency in Baghdad (1852 – 1863)

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Abstract

This article discusses the organizational hierarchy of the Bābīs during the period of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's (d. 1912) concealment from the public and his residency in Baghdad between the years 1852 to 1863. It pursues an analytic historiographical and textual critical approach by mainly utilizing primary and secondary sources in Arabic, Persian and English belonging to both the Bayānīs (i.e. Azalīs) and the Bahā'īs alike. First by offering some brief context, it will explain this organizational hierarchy of the Bābīs during the Middle Bābī period (1850-66), highlighting the role and function of the witnesses of the Bayān (*shuhadā'-i-bayān*). More importantly, it will introduce a hitherto unknown work (and primary source) of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's from that era, namely the *kitāb al-waṣīya* (the Book of the Testament), wherein seven to eight prominent Bābīs of that period were appointed to the rank. The two presently known MSS of this work will be discussed, as well as extensively quoted in translation, with the individuals named in it identified. The sectarian narratives (with their conflicting authority claims) dividing the Bayānīs (i.e. Azalīs) and Bahā'īs over the history of the period will be critically evaluated while also briefly revisiting the 'episode of Dayyān'. It will conclude by proposing the untenability of the terms 'Azalī' and 'Azalī Bābism'. This study supplements Denis MacEoin's two articles on the subject published during the 1980s.

Keywords: 'Abdu'l-Bahā'; Azalī; Bāb; Bābī; Bābism; Baghdad; Bahā'ī; Bahā'ullāh; Bayān; Bayānī; Dayyān; Denis MacEoin; E.G. Browne; hierarchy; Iran; Iraq; *kitāb al-waṣīya*; Mirror; mirrors; Princeton; Qājār; *shahīd*; *shuhadā'*; Ṣubḥ-i-Azal; William M. Miller; Witness; witnesses

Preface to self-published version

The following is a revised (and slightly expanded) version of a piece originally submitted to the journal *Die Welt des Islams* (published by E.J. Brill) in October 2017. Against the specific advice of the cover letter with which the article was originally submitted; and while sitting in review for a five month duration; rather than having the piece assessed by objective and unbiased reviewers, the editor of the journal instead forwarded the piece for blind peer review to two Haifan Bahā'ī fundamentalists as well as a third reviewer (who neither read the article properly nor appears to be able to read handwritten Persian script) who without further ado (and without the editor according its author the right to respond to the three patently unprofessional and quite prejudicially written reviews, not to mention while compromising the actual 'blind' element to the peer review process itself) railroaded the piece for publication altogether over ideologically biased and laughably polemical, sectarian reasons having nothing to do with critical scholarship but everything to do with agenda-driven academic censorship and the continued Bahā'ī control over the narrative of Bābism within the academic publishing world: an experience similarly made by Denis MacEoin during the 1980s as well as others.¹ Rather than make a second attempt with another Western academic journal and likely go through the same undignifying rigamarole (since Bahā'ī gatekeeping over the topic appears to be quite widespread), it is instead being made publicly available as a self-publication. Aside from this, because the current length of this piece exceeds one that most scholarly journals would accept as is; and due to the fact that much of the material is integral to the overall argument being presented; this is yet another reason we are self-publishing it. But first here, the nature of the comments by the reviewers need to be briefly scrutinized.

The first reviewer complains that “some of the sources used are at best questionable,” obliquely referring to Browne, Narāqī, *hasht bihisht*, 'Izzīyah Khānūm, MacEoin and Miller, since these are precisely the sources the Bahā'īs have had enormous problems with given the manner in which these sources throw a completely different light on official Bahā'ī narratives around the subject. The second reviewer, more honest than the first, threw down the gauntlet on that score altogether and outright asserted that these sources are “anti-Bahā'ī.” It would be worthwhile for either the author Denis MacEoin, or someone else, to inform the editor of *Die Welt des Islams* that in 2009 E.J. Brill (who publishes *Die Welt des Islams*) published *The Messiah of Shiraz* which copiously cites and quotes from these very same “anti-Bahā'ī” sources such as Narāqī and the others mentioned here. Be that as it may, a

¹ Which for the author has been a reoccurring experience (except on two occasions in 2013) since at least 2004 whenever attempting to publish Bayānī (Azālī Bābī) related research. On that score, see Denis MacEoin's still relevant “Bahā'ī Fundamentalism and the Academic Study of the Bābī Movement,” *Religion* (1986) **16**: 52-84, online https://bahai-library.com/pdf/m/maceoin_bahai_fundamentalism.pdf (accessed March 17, 2018) which lucidly describes the sort of thing that happened here.

source or a group of them can never be disqualified from mention or historiographical examination merely on the basis of being ‘anti-’; and any genuine historian worth their salt (whatever their personal convictions may be) will point out that anyone stating differently is not engaging in history or scholarship but rather in propaganda and hagiography.

Further engaging in snidey character assassination based on false assertions without evidence (and while blatantly misrepresenting two sentences at the beginning and at the conclusion of the article), the two reviewers then complained about the overall tone of the piece as being polemical but without instancing any credible examples of what they mean, quibbling instead about why the word “schemed” was used in relation to Bahā’ullāh’s activities during the Baghdad period vis-à-vis Şubḥ-i-Azal even though this is verbatim what the Bayānī sources claim (for which citations are provided). They then betrayed their clear ideological animus by stating, “Many statements are made in the article as though they are generally agreed facts, whereas they are actually disputed by the Baha’is,” which is an implied point I actually make throughout: that Bahā’īs do not accept these positions and (anachronistically) dispute them. But because Bahā’īs dispute such facts does not automatically entail that *all* dispute them or that such sources should not otherwise be critically examined (or sourced) in scholarly research and debate just because Bahā’īs don’t like or accept them. Yet this is precisely what the reviewers appear to suggest, that such sources critical of the official Bahā’ī positions should never be sourced in critical public discourse anywhere. History and scholarship by myopia and sleight of hand: ‘post-truth’ at its finest.

They then cast further aspersions regarding the key text of this study by matter of factly declaring the *kitāb al-waṣīya* as a ‘forgery’ even though the implied secondary evidence of at least one Bahā’ī source itself from 1914 -- and a source specifically among the Browne collection at Cambridge University (cited below) -- directly proves its authenticity. While the appearance of a third **MS** (and more) of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* is eagerly awaited, the lame arguments put forward by these two reviewers regarding the *kitāb al-waṣīya* (and without any evidence and/or examination of the text itself) instances precisely the same kind of specious argumentation earlier offered by Bahā’ī leaders during the turn of the last century regarding the purportedly forged nature of *nuṣṣat’ul-kāf*, which as a text (together with its editor E.G. Browne) they viciously attacked and attempted to discredit at that time:² totally unfounded claims which have now thankfully been put to rest with the appearance of

² See the scurrilous attacks on E.G. Browne over this issue by H. M. Balyuzi in his *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá’í Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970), *passim*. Balyuzi’s arguments on this specific question are verbatim summarized from those earlier made by ‘Abd’ul-Bahá’, Mízá Abu’l-Faḍl Gulpāyagānī, his brother Mahdī Gulpāyagānī as well as others.

the Princeton MS of this latter item (with a possible older or contemporaneous MS to the Princeton one presently among a known collection in Qum, Iran).³

Moreover, in an instance of astonishing intellectual dishonesty, the second reviewer further revealed their ideological motivations by claiming that in the Bayān the Bāb had annulled succession altogether, claiming Browne's summary of the Persian Bayān in his English introduction to the edition of *nuqṭat'ul-kāf* as the evidence.⁴ Yet not only do neither the Persian Bayān nor Browne's summary of it maintain this position; in fact this particular assertion is one that specifically originates with Bahā'ullāh (and not the Bāb or Browne) in his *lawḥ-i-sirāj* from the late 1860s when the Azalī-Bahā'ī schism had already become an established fact. Let me reiterate, neither the Bāb in his Persian Bayān nor E.G. Browne claim that succession had been annulled in the Bayān. Instead this is a Bahā'ī perspective retroactively projected and part of the obscuring mechanism that MacEoin has labelled as 'conflation.'⁵ Noteworthy is that this specific talking point has been a reoccurring motif throughout all Bahā'ī anti-Azalī (i.e. Bayānī) polemic and *apologia* since at least the late 1860s. But as Browne, MacEoin and others have tirelessly demonstrated it is not the position of the early Bābīs nor was it one articulated in the early Bābī texts.

It should be emphasized here that the narrative of Bābism detailed below -- which is a narrative supported by the evidence of primary as well as secondary source texts, documents and MSS in Arabic and Persian -- is one that Bahā'ī officialdom and its loyalist intellectual cadre are extremely afraid of: a narrative they have been systematically suppressing in the West since the days of E.G. Browne because this narrative is evidently a political threat to their interests as it contradicts a good chunk of their own official narratives regarding the period. In itself, and at this juncture, this has created the rather odd situation where today there exists far more intellectual latitude and scholarly freedom in Iran under the Islamic Republic to write and publish about this particular angle to Bābism's history than almost anywhere else in the world.

With that said, the author wishes to thank Hossein Kamaly (Assistant Professor in the Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures Department, Barnard College) for reading a draft of this article, and offering helpful comments, as well as tracking down digital scans of the relevant pages from Mahdī Bāmdād cited below.

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³ See William McCants and Kavian Milani 'The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of *Nuqṭat al-kaf* Dated 1268 (1851-2)', *Iranian Studies*, volume 37, number 3 (September 2004): 431-449; and Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 300, Volume 43.

⁴ Online <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/nk/n-q-p-5.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2018).

⁵ See "From Babism to Baha'ism: Problems of Militancy, Quietism, and Conflation in the Construction of a Religion," *Religion* (1983), 13: 219-255, online https://bahai-library.com/pdf/m/maceoin_babism_militancy.pdf (accessed March 18, 2018).

Introduction

Besides those Western Oriental **MSS** collections of Bābī texts held at the British Museum Library, the Bibliothèque nationale of Paris,⁶ Cambridge, Harvard⁷ and Princeton universities;⁸ the past decade and a half has seen more and more items emerge from the private **MSS** collections of the Azalī Bābī (Bayānī⁹) community in Iran itself and, even more importantly, from the family **MSS** heirloom of texts held by Şubḥ-i-Azal's own descendents in Cyprus:¹⁰ texts which are now offering better clarity on once considered opaque facets of the history and doctrine of this important post-Islamic religion of nineteenth century Qājār Iran. During the past few years of this present decade alone two independent **MSS** of Şubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* (the Book of the Testament) have surfaced from specifically private Iranian Bayānī **MSS** collections that detail the response of this community's spiritual head and supreme pontiff regarding the organizational shape the survival of his community was to have taken upon his flight to Iraq (and into a decade of voluntary seclusion) following on the heels of the fierce anti-Bābī state repression brought on by the Qājārs that unfolded just after the botched assassination attempt on Nāṣiruddīn Shāh (d. 1896) in the late summer of 1852.

In the Western academic literature of the 1980s Denis MacEoin touched on the theoretical contours of the Bābī hierocracy (or rather, to now coin a more accurate neologism, *theophanocracy*¹¹) from the writings of the Bāb himself -- particularly as

⁶ See <http://www.gallica.bnf.fr> (accessed October 31, 2017) with a search under 'Babi,' 'Babisme' and 'Soubh-i Azal' for an inventory of the digitized **BnF** Babi **MSS** collection uploaded to that site.

⁷ This refers especially to the collections of Ahmad Hakim, Rouhi (Sarlati) and Qamar Taj Dawlatabadi, which are part of the Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran digital database, online, <http://www.qajarrowomen.org/en/index.html> (accessed October 7, 2017).

⁸ Online, <https://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/C0723.1-47#arrangement> and http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/listing.html (accessed October 6, 2017).

⁹ Note, unless otherwise indicated, *Azalī*, *Azalī Bābī*, *Bābī* and *Bayānī* will be used interchangeably throughout this article. However, 'Bayānī' will be the term chiefly used to refer to this creed. At the conclusion of the article the reasons as to why the term "Azalī" is no longer tenable will be explained. For a general discussion of this community, see Denis MacEoin's *Elr* entry, online, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/azali-babism> (accessed September 1, 2017), now also in *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Bābism* (Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 2009), 591-5, albeit a few of its conclusions need revision in light of recent scholarship in Persian; see especially, Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-maktūm: nigāhi bi-talāsh-hā-i-siyāsī-i-fa'ālān-i-azalī dar mukhālifat bā ḥukūmat-i-qājār va tadārūk-i-inqilāb-i-mashrūti* (Concealed History: An investigation into the role of Azalī activists in opposition to the Qājār regime and the genesis of the Constitutional Revolution), 1st edition (Tehran: Pardis, 1393 solar/2014 CE). A second edition of this work is currently in preparation. See also, Manoucher Bakhtiari *kārnāmiḥ va tath'r-i-digar andishān-i-azalī* (The record and influence of Azalī freethinkers), volume 1 (Berlin: Forūgh, 2016).

¹⁰ See Azal *A Preliminary Survey of the Cyprus Bayānī Corpus: Part I The Works of the Bāb*, online, https://www.academia.edu/29688574/A_Preliminary_Survey_of_the_Cyprus_Bay%C4%81n%C4%AB_Corpus_Part_I_The_Works_of_the_B%C4%81b (accessed October 1, 2017).

¹¹ That is to say, the rule by theophanies. Throughout his later works, and especially *kitāb asmā' al-kullu-shay'* (the Book of the Names of All-Things) and *kitāb-i-panj sha'n* (the Book of the Five Grades), the Bāb held his disciples to be the theophanic instantiations of various divine names and attributes with himself (as the embodiment of the universal primal will) as the generating point of these names and attributes. *Kitāb-i-panj sha'n* revolves around seventeen such divine names and attributes and the key individuals they are addressed to who are held to

elaborated in his Book of the Five Grades (*kitāb-i-panj sha'n*) -- which, for his part, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* during that 1852 period of crisis was attempting to more concretely implement.¹² With the appointment of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (in 1849-50) as the supreme focus of spiritual authority over this Bābī *ecclesia* after the Bāb himself, MacEoin correctly observed "...that the Bāb anticipated some form of continuing *ḥujjiyya*, mediated at first through single individuals and then, if necessary, through the "witnesses" in general..."¹³ Reiterating what *kitāb-i-panj sha'n* had earlier envisaged, the *kitāb al-waṣīya*, in circumstances somewhat reminiscent to the Shi'i Twelfth Imām's period of minor occultation (*ghaybat al-sughrā*), set out to accomplish precisely this very thing by ensuring the survival of this community with the appointment of *witnesses* (*shuhadā'*) to the Bayān (his assembly of *wukalā'*, as it were); this, while simultaneously anticipating a situation where he himself would no longer be present in order to actively guide the Bābī faithful, including the anticipation of his own possibly imminent demise.

In more recent Persian academic scholarship, Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi's 2013 MA thesis fleshed out some of the historical details of this period based on the evidence of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* itself that with the aid of mainly secondary sources in Persian belonging to both the Bayānīs and the Bahā'īs alike teased out valuable information on these questions previously believed to be obscure in the critical scholarship of any language.¹⁴ Much more work needs to be done, of course, but with the emergence of key texts from out of the obscurity they were once relegated to, we are now much better situated to elucidate on many of the murkier details of that period of Bābism's history than even some of those pioneers in the academy writing about the subject during the 1970s and 1980s. Although not solely responsible, the current situation is also due in large measure to the efforts of the Bayānī community itself in making many of the important texts and writings of their creed publicly available. But first, before we discuss the general outlines of the situation any further, a brief summary excursus on Bābism itself during what MacEoin has termed its early and middle periods is in order as a necessary digression.

archetypally embody them, see below for citation. For *kitāb al-asmā' al-kullu-shay'*, see online, <http://www.bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=asma&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed November 2, 2017).

¹² See his 'Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought' in *In Iran: Studies in Early Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, volume 3 (ed.) Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986), 95-141, as well as 'Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism (1850-1866)' in *Studia Iranica* 18:1 (1989): 97-129. Both are now also in *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 325-68 and 369-407 respectively.

¹³ *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 358.

¹⁴ Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-firqi-i-bābīyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280* (The History of the Bābī sect in Baghdad from 1852 to 1863) (Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University, unpublished dissertation, 2013), chapter 4. At the time of writing his thesis, Nabavi only possessed a single MS of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* which is our MS (2) here. In this article, whenever this study is cited, the page numbers refer to the internal pagination of the chapter and not to that of the thesis as a whole.

In 1844 (1260 AH) Siyyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (b. 1235 AH/1819 CE – d. 1266 AH/1850 CE), a young lay adherent of the Shaykhī school from the mercantile class, advanced the claim to being the special deputy of the Hidden Twelfth Imām of Shi‘ism, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. On this basis historical posterity has come to know him as the *bāb* (gate/threshold). Stressing in his *qayyūm al-asmā’*¹⁶ (the Peerless Names) the imminence of the Twelfth Imām’s near advent, in that early work he called the Shi‘i faithful (and particularly the Qājār state and ‘ulamā) to his side as the Hidden Imām’s exclusive representative and chosen mouthpiece, claiming in it to be preparing the necessary groundwork for the Imām’s eschatological *parousia* and subsequent apocalyptic insurrection (*khurūj*). As a consequence he almost immediately attracted to himself quite a number of devotees as well as many powerful enemies. Galvanized by the expectation of imminent messianic fulfilment, in this period the Bāb’s early followers widely proselytized his claims throughout Iran and Iraq in order to erect what they deemed to be the groundwork for the impending return of the Twelfth Imām. His adversaries (who consisted mainly of the orthodox Shi‘i clergy and the Qājār establishment) likewise vigorously opposed him and the influence of his movement.

However, during the fourth year of his ministry (1847-8), and in events bearing striking similarity to an earlier Nizārī Ismā‘īlī trajectory of experience during the year 1164 CE,¹⁷ the Bāb made a fundamental shift in position and doctrine, now maintaining the *parousia* of the Twelfth Imām to have occurred in his own person.¹⁸ In addition to this, he also proclaimed the abrogation of the religious dispensation of Islam -- and specifically of its *sharī‘a*¹⁹ -- while claiming to be the inaugurator of an altogether new one superseding it, namely, the *Bayān*. Although with this specific claim a number of his early followers abandoned him -- namely, those specific

¹⁵ For other, more recent Western academic scholarship on Bābism, see Azal ‘Invoking the Seven Worlds: An acrostic prayer by Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal,’ *LUVAH: Journal of the Creative Imagination* (Summer 2013), 1-35; idem ‘Journey with me unto the Divine Throne’ (Winter 2013), 2-28; also, (ed.) Omid Ghaemmaghami and Todd Lawson *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb (1819-1850)* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012); Todd Lawson *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur’an, Exegesis, Messianism and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi movement in Iran, 1844-50* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989; reprinted, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005); and Armin Eschraghi *FRÜHE ŠAIHĪ- UND BĀBĪ-THEOLOGIE: Die Darlegung der Beweise für Muḥammads besonderes Prophetentum* (Ar-Risāla fī Iṭbāt an-Nubūwa al-Ḥaṣṣa) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004).

¹⁶ A commentary on the Qur’ān’s *sūrah* of Joseph (12), online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=ahsan&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 3, 2017); see also especially Lawson above.

¹⁷ See particularly Christian Jambet *La grande résurrection d’Alamūt: Les formes de la liberté dans le shi’isme ismaélien* (Paris: Verdier, 1990).

¹⁸ The epistle forming this proclamation can be found in *qismatī az alvāh-i-khaṭṭ-i-nuqṭa-i-ūla va āqā ḥusayn-i-kātib* (Segments from the tablets in the handwriting of the Primal Point and Āqā Ḥusayn the scribe) (n.p., n.d.), online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=some> (accessed October 4, 2017), 12-13 (digital pagination: 23-4).

¹⁹ See especially the Persian *Bayān* (*bayān-i-fārsī*), *passim*. For full citation and hyperlink, see below.

followers who were expecting a more conventionally orthodox and narratively *exoteric* fulfilment of the Twelfth Imām's eschatological return -- nevertheless it also drew other devotees to him. But while already furiously building up to this reality, the event of the Bāb's proclamation in this fourth year also punctuated the emergence of a momentous schism within Twelver Shi'ism.

As the evidence of the Persian Bayān clearly shows, it should be underscored that at this point the Bāb believed himself to be the recipient of a new "divine revelation" directly from God, and without the intermediary of an angel. From this point forward he claimed to be the "possessor of the universal manifestation" (*ṣāhib-i-ṣubḥ-i-kullī*) and thus the abrogator of Islam as a religious dispensation. He also maintained that theophanies and theophanic cycles in general (or 'manifestations', i.e. *ṣubḥ-rāt*) would continue indefinitely after his own, progressively unfolding from one dispensational *aeon* to the next without termination. He termed the future manifestation superseding his own as "he whom God shall make manifest" (*man yuṣḥiruhu'llāh*).

In his final year (1849-50), as it was becoming increasingly clear that his own days were numbered, the textual evidence demonstrates that the Bāb appointed as his successor the young nineteen year old (and son of a former Qājār courtier and court calligrapher) Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī²⁰ to whom he bestowed such lofty titles as "the name of God, the pre-eternal" (*ism allāh al-azal*), "the dawn of pre-eternity" (*ṣubḥ-i-azal*), "the fruit of pre-eternity" (*thamara azalīya*) and "the name of God, the one" (*ism allāh al-waḥīd*), to name just a few.²¹ As these early historiographies and texts visibly show, in the Bāb's estimation Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* was considered by him to be the "possessor of a minor manifestation" (*ṣāhib-i-ṣubḥ-i-juz'ī*) in tandem with the Bāb's universal one. While in one epistle also asserting his spiritual identity with *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* (and *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal*'s with him²²), in this vein the Bāb elevated (and so positioned) *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* as his "mirror" (*mir'āt*) reflecting the "sun of reality" (*shams-i-ḥaqīqat*), which is to say, the Bāb himself.

It should be noted here that this position is one opposed to the official Bahā'ī historiographies on the subject who maintain the Bāb did not conceive any immediate succession to himself in the Bayān: a retroactive and anachronistic position (which is part of the mechanism of 'conflation', as MacEoin has labelled it) which all the earliest **MSS** evidence and documentation clearly contradicts and one which is underscored as being a later position in *The Messiah of Shirāz*.²³

²⁰ In the "The Bábís of Persia. I: Sketch of Their History, and Personal Experiences Among Them," JRASGBI, Vol. 21, no.3 (July 1889), 485-526, E.G. Browne states, "On the death of the Báb, Mīrzá Yahya, who received the title of "Hazrat-i-Ezel" ("His Highness the Eternal"), was chosen by general consensus of opinion as his successor....," 513.

²¹ See E.G. Browne's epitome translation of *hasht bihišt* where (quoting the Bāb himself) a summary list of these titles are given, in *A Traveller's Note Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume II, Note W (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1891), online <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092304512> (accessed October 21, 2017), 353.

²² *Qismatī az alvāh-i-khaṭṭ-i-nuqṭa-i-ūla va āqā ḥusayn-i-kātib*, 4-8 (digital pagination: 15-19).

²³ Ibid., 357-8. Further on MacEoin notes, "The earliest expression of the Bahā'ī attitude is, as far as I can tell,

In 1852, approximately two years after the execution of the Bāb, a group of Bābīs unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Naṣīruddīn Shāh Qājār (d. 1896) in a botched undertaking. The response from the Qājār establishment was swift, decisive and severe, resulting in the deaths of a number of senior Bābīs. It was after this incident whereby Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī -- who by this time was widely known as “his holiness the pre-eternal” (*ḥaḍrat-i-azal*) -- left Iran and began living incognito in Baghdad for a period of just over ten (nearing eleven) years. His older brother Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī (d. 1892), who was at the time a very active Bābī and prominent with the title of “his eminence, the splendor” (*jināb-i-bahā’*),²⁴ likewise joined Ṣubḥ-i-Azal in Baghdad and took up residence there. At a later point Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī fully augmented his title to *Bahā’ullāh* (the splendor of God), a title which he has been known by ever since.

In mid 1863, at the time when Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, Bahā’ullāh and the Bābīs were ordered out of Baghdād by Ottoman authorities; among a small group of schismatic loyalists, Bahā’ullāh quietly put forward the claim to being the recipient of an independent, superior theophany to the Bāb’s and thus “the universal manifestation” foretold in the Bayān, namely, ‘he whom God shall make manifest’ (*man yuzḥiruhu’Llāh*). Four years later in Edrine on the Black sea coast during 1866-7, he made this claim publicly explicit among all the Bābīs and was immediately faced with fierce opposition by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and his leading partisans.²⁵ Gradually, and by stages, many Bābīs -- albeit not many among those meagre numbers still alive from the original cadre of the 1840s -- went over to Bahā’ullāh and henceforth became known as Bahā’īs whereas those who remained loyal to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (and no longer

found in the writings of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Bahā’ Allāh from the Edirne period (1864–68), such as the *Lawḥ-i sirājī*. Here, it is categorically stated that “my previous manifestation effaced the decree of succession (*ḥukm-i wiṣāyat*) all at once from the Book” and that the Bayān referred only to “letters” and “mirrors,” the latter being unnumbered,” *ibid.*, 369. But there is no such statement by the Bāb that ‘effaces the decree of succession’ in the Persian Bayān (or anywhere else in his writings) and such an anachronistic position (retroactively projected) is untenable based on the evidence of the earliest texts and MSS. Earlier in “...a letter of the Bāb’s to Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī, to whom he writes: “The cause shall reach the Name *al-Wahid* [i.e., Mīrzā Yaḥyā Ṣubḥ-i Azal], for his appearance in himself is a proof; and after him, should God reveal one like him possessed of proof, it [the cause] shall reach him; otherwise the cause is in the hands of the witnesses in the Bayān, until the day of him whom God shall manifest in the next resurrection,” *ibid.*, 357-8. A few scholars, including MacEoin, have sometimes posited that because multiple theophanic claimants arose in the period immediately following the Bāb’s death in July 1850 that this makes Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s succession and preeminence only one in a multiple of possible doctrinal positions during that period. However, and as the passages MacEoin himself quotes demonstrate, on the question of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal specifically, such ‘multiple doctrinal positions’ were not ones propounded by the Bāb himself in the texts that have survived from the period (especially those from the period between mid 1849 to his death in July 1850). In that regard, the neologism ‘theophanocracy’ may possibly aid in the proper contextualization of this overall situation.

²⁴ See (ed.) E.G. Browne *Kitāb Nuqtat’ul-Kāf: Being the Earliest History of the Bābīs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1910), online, <https://archive.org/details/NuqtatulKaforiginalE.G.BrowneEdition> (accessed October 30, 2017), 239 and *passim*.

²⁵ Juan R.I. Cole has detailed some of the events of this public schism in 1867 from an exclusively Bahā’ī point of view, see ‘The Azalī-Bahā’ī Crisis of September 1867’, in (ed.) Moshe Sharon *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements, and the Bābī-Bahā’ī Faiths* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004): 227-51. However, there are reasons to remain cautious about his sourcing as well as his rather onesided, tendentious treatment of the overall event.

identifiable under the exclusive rubric of Bābīs) over time were identified in the popular consciousness as ‘Azalīs’.

The position of the Witness of the Bayān (*shahīd-i-bayān*) in the religion of the Bāb

First, it should be briefly mentioned here that the entire conception of the witnesses of the Bayān bears an uncanny resemblance to the *Ismā‘īlī dā‘īs* (summoners) of the medieval period, but for purposes of the present study we leave this question open ended for the time being. That stated, while the Letters of the Living (*ḥurūf al-ḥayy*) as a hierarchy occupied the preeminent rank underneath the Bāb himself in the formative stages of the movement,²⁶ in his writings from the 1847 period onward a witness (*shahīd*) appears to describe any person possessing an eminent rank within Bābism. There also seems to be a crossover or overlap (as well as a sort of parallelism) between these two stations of ‘Letter’ and ‘Witness’ since, as we shall see, two surviving members of the Letters of Living of the first and second tiers ended up becoming witnesses of the Bayān under Subḥ-i-Azal.²⁷ Now, in the Persian Bayān the Bāb there indicates that the witnesses are among those who, from the time of the Bāb’s death until the period of the following manifestation (or *parousia*), are to be the guides mediating the scriptures of his religion to its faithful.²⁸ Here the Bāb distinguished two types of divine proofs: the divinely revealed verses (*āyāt*), which he terms *ḥujjat-i-bāqīya* (the remaining proof), and the one -- or, rather, the locus of the divine logos-self (*nafs allāh*) who embodies the primal will (*mashī‘a ūlā*) -- to whom these verses are revealed, which he terms *ḥujjat-i-zāhira* (the outward proof).²⁹ In his

²⁶ Particularly given that the doctrine of the Persian Bayān holds them to be the *return* of the fourteen infallibles of Shi‘ism -- i.e. Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the twelve Imāms -- plus the four gates (or alternatively the four archangels of the divine throne), see *bayān-i-fārsī* 1:2-19, 6-10 (7-11 in the PDF).

²⁷ A few of the Bayāni histories such as *tanbīh al-nā‘imīn* and *hasht bihisht* sometimes refer to Letters of the Living of the first, second, third, fourth tiers and beyond, with the first tier being the preeminent level, namely, the first group of eighteen individuals (i.e. the preceders, *sābiqūn*) who initially in 1844 came to believe in the Bāb and his claims, see Mīrzā Aghā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī *hasht bihisht* <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/akirmani/akirmani.htm> (accessed September 18, 2017), 302-303/216 (PDF: 233).

²⁸ This would suggest that, while the overall station of the Letters of the Living was deemed to be preeminent immediately underneath that of the Bāb’s own rank during the term of his lifetime, after his death the ‘functional’ or ‘active’ element to the preeminence of these Letters was in theory then conceived to henceforth devolve upon the witnesses underneath the Mirror. The passage quoted below from *panj sha’n* appears to implicitly bolster this schematic parallelism. Note also MacEoin’s point where (as a consequence of the then dwindling numbers in the movement’s original cadre of leadership) he indicates, “...A second generation of converts...[came to] replace the *ḥurūf al-ḥayy* [Letters of the Living] (who had either been killed or forced to opt for obscurity) as authorities and teachers...” *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 372.

²⁹ Siyyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *bayān-i-fārsī* (the Persian Bayān) (Tehrān: n.p., 1946), 3:2, 22 (PDF: 23), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/G-L/I/inba62/INBA62.pdf> and (2013 digital edition) <http://www.bayanic.com/lib/typed/sacred/Point/Persian-Bayan/PersianBayan.pdf> (accessed October 7, 2017). The paginations cited here and below refer to the 1946 edition (i.e. the PDF in the first hyperlink). Also, the subsection (or gate, *bāb*) is here mentioned first before the chapter (or unity, *wāḥid*). Further on down this same section, on the following page, the Bāb broaches the overall situation in the classical imamological terms of medieval Shi‘i doctrine and explicitly phrases it in terms of the ‘silent book’ (*kitāb-i-ṣāmī*) and the ‘speaking book’

outlook the first proof it to endure until “the day of resurrection” (*yawm al-qīyāma*), meaning, the following *zuhūr* or theophany. This suggests that in the Bābī doctrine the writings of the Bāb are viewed to act as the central focus of exclusive obedience by its believers until the period of the succeeding *zuhūr* of the Bābī *maw‘ūd*, or promised one, i.e. *man yuzhiruhu’Llāh*, when they will then be abrogated. The second proof denotes the person of the Bāb himself who during his own lifetime, theoretically at least, overshadowed his followers in every respect. The Bāb then maintains that from the period of his permanent concealment to the period of the succeeding *zuhūr*, the witnesses are to act as the foremost guides of the Bayān.³⁰ However, here *bayān* does not merely denote the two texts of the Arabic and Persian Bayāns *eo ipse*. Rather it signifies the entire corpus of the Bāb’s scriptural and doctrinal works.³¹ Given this, and not at all foreign to any notional concept of a clergy (and specifically ‘bishops’), one can glean that the Bāb considered the witnesses to be the expositors and commentators of his writings who guide the believers of the Bayān by them until the Bābī *parousia*, which according to the Persian Bayān is supposed occur somewhere at 1511 to 2001 years from the Bāb’s own time.³²

In the 1850 *kitāb-i-panj sha’n* (among his final works) the Bāb again broaches the topic of the witnesses. From the outset he speaks of persons who during the period of his permanent absence are to be the guides of his religion to its believers, specifying them (sometimes interchangeably) as *adillā’* (proofs), *shuhadā’* (witnesses) and *huffāz* (protectors), among other things. He then speaks of the appointment of a

(*kitāb-i-nātiq*). For all references to the witnesses in the Arabic Bayān, see 13:2 (8), 6:5 (19), 18:7 (32), 16:8 (38, here referred to instead as *wukalā’ min ‘ind allāh*), 1:9 (40), 17:10 (52) and 10:11 (57) with its first mention in 1:1 (3) being in reference to the imāms of Shi‘ism, online

<http://www.bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=abay&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed November 1, 2017) as well as <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/A-F/b/bayana/bayana.htm> (accessed November 1, 2017)

(paginations here refer to the first hyperlink).

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār* (Mysteries of the Writings), vol.2 (n.p.: 124 *badī’*/1967-8 CE), 98-101.

³² Siyyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *bayān-i-fārsī*, 15:3, 100 (PDF: 101). The numerological ciphers given to indicate the time span are *ghīyāth* (whose *abjad* numerical value is 1511) and *mustaghāth* (2001) respectively. As to the long interval anticipated between ‘two manifestations’ in the original Bābī doctrine, in *The Messiah of Shīrāz* MacEoin indicates, “...The Bāb’s own writings, as we have seen, imply an interval similar to that between any two previous prophets. The reference to temples appearing every sixty-six years would seem to preclude any manifestation before at least one such period. More telling are the numerous passages that anticipate the appearance of Bābī kings, ministers, governors, and ulamā; or the conquest of the entire earth by the Bābīs; or the general application of Bābī laws, including that of pilgrimage; or the construction of mosques and tombs; or the levying of taxes; or the regulation of trade -- all of which necessitate the existence of a developed and stable Bābī state...It is also, I think, obvious that it is impossible to maintain that the Bāb clearly foretold the year of the appearance of him whom God shall manifest or identified him with a living individual, and at the same time to hold that he set no time at all or, indeed, that he felt some need to refer to the latest date of the manifestation as 1511 or 2001 years in the future. Early Bābī opinion as to the probable lateness of the next manifestation would have been reinforced by numerous statements of the Bāb, particularly in the *Panj sha’n*, to the effect that, unless the creation begun under one manifestation has reached a state of completion (or perfection), the next manifestation will not arrive...” *ibid.*, 358 and 360.

single *mirror* (*mir'āt*) who reflects the *sun of reality* (namely, the Bāb himself) and who stands at the apex of the Bābī hierarchy:

...In every theophany (*ẓuhūr*) God has chosen what he wills for the locus of the manifestation of his logos-self (*maẓhar nafsihi*), among them being secure proofs (*adillā' mustadillūn*) and sanctified witnesses (*shuhadā' muqaddasūn*) and protective preservers (*huffāz ḥāfiẓūn*) and purified pioneers (*ruwād ṣāffūn*) and lucent verifiers (*qunnād madqūn*) in order to safeguard the commands of God from theophanic cycle to theophanic cycle and thereby call all to God from cycle of concealment to cycle of concealment (*buṭūn ila buṭūn*); and God, glorified be he, chose in that [meaning 'this'] cycle of theophany a mirror victorious (*mir'ātan mumtani'an*) and a crystal elevated (*bulūriya murtafi'a*) reflecting in it the sun of reality (*shams al-ḥaqīqa*) and disclosing upon it the point of divinity (*nuqṭa ilāhiya*) and divulging within it the pre-eternal being (*kaynūniya azaliya*)...³³

A *mirror* (*mir'āt*) in the Bāb's estimation is thus any person who like himself is the recipient of divine inspiration and theophanic revelations; except that with the Mirror this occurs under the overall shadow of the Bāb's own 'religious dispensation' rather than one originating an independent creed.³⁴ In its conception, this is precisely analogous to the relationship of the Prophet to the Imām in Shi'ism. So given the evidence of the historical and doctrinal sources at our disposal, the 'Mirror' (*mir'āt*) here obviously instances Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal who, as mentioned, is generally agreed in the earliest sources to have been expressly appointed by the Bāb as his successor in this specific role.³⁵ These sources depict the situation wherein the

³³ Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *kitāb-i-panj sha'n* (n.p., n.d., lithograph), online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=panj&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> and <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/M-R/panj/panjshan.htm> (accessed October 9, 2017), 199-200 (this refers to the pagination of the lithograph itself rather than that of the digital Bayanic.com text). MacEoin offers a paraphrase of this passage in *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 357. Unless noted otherwise, all remaining translations in this article are mine.

³⁴ Citation of the Bāb by Mullā Rajab 'Alī Qahīr in *kitāb-i-mullā rajab 'alī-i-qahīr* (the Book of Mullā Rajab 'Alī Qahīr), **MS CUL** (Cambridge University Library), E.G. Browne Collection, F.24(9): **22a-b**; see also, *kitāb-i-mullā rajab 'alī-i-qahīr*, online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=qahir&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 9, 2017). However, it should also be borne in mind that in the Persian Bayān the Bāb identifies 'he whom God shall make manifest' (*man yuẓhiruhu'llāh*) likewise by the title 'mirror' (*mir'āt*), see especially Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *bayān-i-fārsī, lughāt va iṣṭilāḥāt* (glossary and terms), 2 (PDF: 339).

³⁵ See the *lawḥ-i-visāyat* (the will and testament of the Bāb), <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=vesayat>, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/S-Z/vasaya/vasaya.htm> and the **INBA** (Iranian National Bahā'ī Archives) **64** text https://bahai-library.com/pdf/v/vasaya_01.pdf (accessed October 7, 2017). Although multiple handwritten versions of this particular document (in the hand of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as well as others) is available in the Browne **CUL**, Paris, Princeton, British Museum, (presumably) the **IBA** (International Bahā'ī Archives) in Haifa, Harvard as well as the Cyprus and the private Iranian Bayānī **MSS** collections; the Bayānīs first published a photostatic facsimile of its text in the *shikastih* hand of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal himself in the lithograph edition of *mutammim-i-bayān* (n.p., n.d.), i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's continuation of the Persian Bayān up to the end of the eleventh chapter; see also Sepehr Manouchehri's English translation, online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol7/BABWILL.htm> (accessed October 7, 2017); and the French translation of A.-L.-M. Nicolas which is found in the preface to his *LE BEYÂN ARABE: LE LIVRE SACRÉ DU BÂBYSME DE SEYYED ALI MOHAMED DIT LE BÂB* (Paris: Leroux, 1905): 53-66; idem,

Bāb apparently recognized in Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as being someone like himself who was a recipient of ‘divine revelation’, ‘spiritual illumination’ and ‘theophanic inspirations’, and so (these sources maintain) upon such rationale the Bāb appointed him as his spiritual successor.³⁶ Of course, while not completely disputing the appointment, it also ought to be pointed out that the Bahā’ī sources (retroactively) consider this appointment to have occurred purely for reasons of political expediency³⁷ (*maṣlahat*) although during most of the Baghdād period, outwardly at least, Bahā’ullāh himself was extremely deferential towards Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and earlier held him in the same reverential light as the Bayānīs. To illustrate the point, it is worthwhile here to quote some key passages from Bahā’ullāh’s own Baghdad era will and testament:

...Hear the call of the most holy leaf speaking unto you from behind the veils, for it is he who is the one whom God [i.e. the Bāb] hath appointed as the peerless self-subsistent (*al-qayyūm*). Verily he is the pre-eternal luminary...Whomsoever turns aside from him hath perished...He is the white hand in the siniatic mount for the Israel of the Bayān...God hath ordained in

also see *Qui est le successeur du Bāb* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1933), online http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/diglib/books/K-O/N/Succesneur/Nicolas-Who_is_the_successor_of_Bab-1933.pdf (accessed March 12, 2018).

³⁶ See E.G. Browne’s summary translation from *hasht bihisht* regarding the circumstances of the appointment in *A Traveller’s Note Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume II, Note W, 352-4.

³⁷ ‘Abbās Effendī ‘Abd’ul-Bahā’ (d. 1921) *maqālīh-i-shakhshī-i-sayyāh kih dar tafsīl-i-qazīyih-i-bāb nivishtih ast* (mu’assasah-i-millī-i-maṭbū‘āt-i-amrī, Tehran: 119 badī’/1962-63 CE), 67-9; also in (ed.) E.G. Browne *A Travellers Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume 1, online, <https://archive.org/details/atravellersnarr00browgoog> (accessed October 21, 2017), 79-80. Also see Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 5 (n.p., 129 badī’/1972-3 CE), 347, where Bahā’u’llāh is quoted as saying, “Glory be to God! Haven’t the critics and detractors (*mu‘aridīn va munkirīn*) realized by now that what was sent over to the forerunner (*mubashshir*), meaning the Point [i.e. the Bāb], was by whom? The knowledge is with God, the Lord of the worlds!” Glossing upon this statement, Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī writes: “The intention here is that the letters of correspondence between Mīrzā Yaḥyā [i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal] and the Point [i.e. the Bāb] in the prison of Mākū (sic) [it was actually Chihriq – trans.], which became the reason for issuing the specified written decree [of succession], was at the dictation of that holiness [i.e. Bahā’ullāh].” However, such statements by the Bahā’ī founder are from the later period when the Azalī-Bahā’ī schism was already an established fact. They do not explain his own recorded utterances and statements regarding Ṣubḥ-i-Azal during this Baghdad period, especially those made in his own Baghdad era will and testament (see below) as well as other surviving documents; nor, for that matter, do they explain the Bāb’s own expressed attitude towards Bahā’ullāh himself (whom he addressed only with the *abjad* notation of ‘238’, i.e. the numerical value of Ḥusayn-‘Alī, and as the ‘brother of the Fruit’ [*akh al-thamara*] i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal) in one existent piece of correspondence where he directs him to protect Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, a short epistle whose key section in translation we quote here in full: “...From the element of the Most Splendorous (*az ‘unṣur-i-abhā’*), namely Yaḥyā [i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal], the written tablets (*alvāḥ-i-mastūrih*), which hath disclosed from the simple substance of ecstatic spiritual attraction, were perused, thanks be the discloser of majesty, majestic and tremendous be he! Exercise a perfect watchfulness over the spirit and vitality (*rūḥ va irtivāh*) of that considered one [i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal] so that the fierce simoom winds (*aryāḥ-i-mushriqa*) do not settle upon the heart of that inhabitant; and, in writing and dictation, the means of joy and delight in the acme of perfection should be facilitated for his sake such that he, absolutely, never ever beholds any grief or sorrow, neither secretly nor openly. And take the utmost care of him and his treasured works (*āthār-i-makhzūna*) until your own time arrives (*tā vaqt-i-khud*), for God is with the patient!” cited in ‘Izzīyah Khānūm *tanbīh al-nā’imīn* (Exhortation to the Slumberers), (ed.) Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi (Tehran: nashr-i-nigāh-i-mu‘āṣir, 1394 solar/2015-6 CE), 186-7.

the book that after the remembrance [*dhikr*, i.e. the Bāb] that all should turn themselves towards the axis of this cause...O people of the Bayān, can anyone produce like verses (*āyāt*) as unto those revealed in the book?...Verily the remnant of God (*baqīyat'u'llāh*) in these days is the ascendant light...Witness in your hearts the appearance of that ascendant light, for the remnant of God who will appear in *mustaghāth* [i.e. 2001] is indeed the real truth...Say, is not the face of light sufficient unto you all, who is seen from behind the veils of glory by a command from God, the all-seeing, the peerless self-subsistent? O people, have I not summoned you unto God and his verses and unto the ascendant light?...Upon you all be the remembrance [i.e. the Bāb] and unto those who prostrate themselves before the face of God...Verily God hath made that Joseph, the light, the sovereign of the true one in the city of the Bayān. But the people are as dead, concealing themselves behind the veils of their own base egos, for the leaves of these pages are proof of my servitude to his face [i.e. *wajh*, one of Subh-i-Azal's epithets bestowed by the Bāb³⁸], would you but know it, otherwise destroy them in the river so that those in the realm of contingency might bear witness to the verses of God, their Lord...³⁹

As opposed to the anachronisms replete in the later Bahā'ī sources, the Bayānīs obviously consider the 1849-50 appointment of Subh-i-Azal by the Bāb to have been sincere with its veracity unimpeachable.⁴⁰

³⁸ See E.G. Browne, *A Traveller's Note Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume II, Note W, 353.

³⁹ A scan of the original facsimile of this document in full as well as a typescript can be found online, <http://bayanic.com/notes/bahaTest/BahaTestament.html> (accessed October 13, 2017). The facsimile forms an appendix to the first typescript edition of 'Izzīyah Khānūm's *tanbīh al-nā'imīn* (n.p., n.d.), 142-44. In Siyyid Miqdād Nabavī-Razavī's recent edition of *tanbīh al-nā'imīn* an introductory discussion followed by a typescript of this text is found on 341-52 with the original facsimile (the same as in the first edition) in the final appendix (note: from this point forward whenever *tanbīh al-nā'imīn* is cited, it will be cited according to its first typescript edition). Moreover, Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī confirms that "...in his [earlier] professed declarations of servitude [towards Subh-i-Azal], [Bahā'u'llāh] would make the cap of pride and boastful vainglory reach the summit of the heavens..." in *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn* (Remonstrance to the Heedless Ones), CUL, E.G. Browne Collection, F.63(9), 172, online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=tazk&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 8, 2017) (pagination at 171 in digital Bayanic.com edition).

⁴⁰ In his book length treatise in response to the claims of Bahā'u'llāh, Mullā Rajab 'Alī Qahīr writes, "...among the clan, the leadership of that holiness [i.e. Subh-i-Azal] became undoubted and accepted [by all] during the very lifetime of his holiness the supreme [i.e. the Bāb]; and he [i.e. the Bāb] gave glad tidings of the manifestation of that divine countenance in countless versical-signs of holiness (*āyāt-i-muqaddisa*), in many of the logoic-words of blessedness (*kalimāt-i-mukarama*); and within his own mighty books (*kutub-i-mu'ẓama*) [this matter] was set and sealed by him, and many of his servants were duly informed [directly] by him [of the appointment]....," in *kitāb-i-mullā rajab 'alī qahīr*, 24. Mullā Rajab 'Alī Qahīr, about whom more will be said below, was accounted as one of the staunchest opponents of Bahā'u'llāh, and according to the account given by the Bayānīs, for this specific reason he was eventually assassinated by the Bahā'īs in Baghdad in 1869-70 (1286 AH). Hājī Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī (d. 1908), who will also be discussed further below, names him among those Bayānīs killed by the Bahā'īs, and writes, "...and that elevated one, the learned agent, the peerless, his eminence Qahīr, may God upraise his station to the utmost heights, composed a noble treatise in refutation [i.e. of Bahā'u'llāh], in elegance and with accuracy, the likes of which have not been seen or written, and wherein is sufficiency....," in Hājī Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī *faṣl al-kalām*, 66

The relation of the witnesses to the Mirror

Per these early Bābī sources, it seems that the Bāb maintained the position whereby after the death of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, and before the *zuhūr* of *man yuẓhiruhu* ʾLlāh, other mirrors would eventually arise in the Bayān.⁴¹ In his will and testament addressed to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, he instructs Ṣubḥ-i-Azal that if at the time of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's death another Mirror should not appear, that he entrust the leadership of the Bābīs over to the witnesses. With reference to this document, it is clear that in the period of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's own permanent absence, or that of one like him, in such an eventuality the Bāb had instructed that the Bābīs turn to the witnesses of the Bayān as the new focus of religious authority from that point forward. In this particular text the witnesses have been specifically characterized as those who are vigilant and who do not transgress the 'limits set by God' (*ḥudūd allāh*). Moreover, they are distinguished as being those most informed of the laws and ordinances of the Bayān, since the requisite standard according to this text is knowledge of those doctrinal limits that aren't to be transgressed. As such, per the explicit evidence of this document, the witnesses are to be considered here as those who are the most eminently learned among the Bābīs in both their knowledge of the Bābī sacred texts as well as the practice of its ordinances and laws.

To reiterate the point, in the glossary of words and technical terms, under the entry "witnesses" (*shuhadāʾ*), the Bayānī publishers of the 1946 edition of the Persian Bayān have glossed the term as "...that rank established underneath the mirrors who are those who do not transgress the limits..."⁴² Given this, it must be stressed again

(see full citation below). It appears that Qahīr was the first of the Bayānīs to undertake the composition of a specific treatise of refutation (*raddīya*) against Bahāʾullāh's claims. Moreover, Siyyid Maḥdī Gulpāygānī, the Bahāʾī missionary, polemicalizes Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr as, "...the first in the Bayān to reject/rebuke God..." (*...awwal man radda ʿalā allāh fī al-bayān...*), while characterizing the treatise as "*muʿtafikāt*" (complete lies) because it was composed "...in refutation of the beauty of the merciful [i.e. Bahāʾullāh]," in Mīrzā Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpāygānī and Siyyid Miḥdī Gulpāygānī *kashf al-ghitāʾ ʿan ḥil al-aʿdāʾ*, (Tashkent: 1919), 266 (see full citation below).

⁴¹ Mullā ʿAlī Muḥammad Sirāj *kitāb-i-sirāj* (the Book of Sirāj), digital edition, online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=seraj&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed September 18, 2017), 32-3. Sirāj quotes the Bāb as saying, "...there shall reflect from that Mirror another Mirror then [from] that [next] Mirror another Mirror then from that [next] Mirror another Mirror then from that [next] Mirror another Mirror then from that [next] Mirror another Mirror then from that [next] Mirror another Mirror; and if mention were to be made to the end of which there is no end, there would be no cessation to the love in my heart/blaze-flux (*fuʾādī*) in regard to those scintillant reflections and rising theophanies. However, with the absolute latent purity (*bi-fitraṭi maḥḍa*) [in which he appeared, i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal], until that time God shall not manifest another Mirror [of his like]. And God shall manifest him [the future Mirror or even the Bābī messiah?] howsoever he wills. Verily he is powerful over all things!" (ibid.) His brother Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr quotes another item from the Bāb reinforcing the point even further, stating that "...as long as the sun shines all will be illumined by its radiance; and afterwards if one like him should arise then you will be guided by one similar to him, and you will be illumined by the radiance of God until it reaches/concludes with the unity (*wāḥid*)..." to which point Qahīr asserts that this indicates that there may be nineteen overall individual mirrors who will arise in the Bayān (i.e. *wāḥid*, one/unity, being nineteen in *abjad* numerology), in *kitāb-i-mullā rajab ʿalī-i-qahīr*, 21-2.

⁴² Siyyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *bayān-i-fārsī, lughāt va iṣṭilāḥāt* (glossary and terms), 3 (340 in the PDF).

that after the *sun of reality* (i.e. the Bāb) and the *mirror* (i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal or one like him) the rank of a Witness of the Bayān was deemed in the doctrine of the Bāb as the third rank below them. On the basis of these sources, one can conclude that the witnesses of the Bayān were considered among those possessing the highest station and rank in the hierarchy of the Bābī *ecclesia* underneath that of its founder and successor. They were deemed of such high station in this perspective that during the period of the absence of the mirrors (i.e. the spiritual successors of the Bāb) the overall authority of Bābīsm and its community was to devolve exclusively upon them. On this basis, therefore, the Bābīs were duty bound to turn instead to the witnesses of the Bayān as the new locus of spiritual authority in the event that upon the death of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal no other mirror(s) should arise to replace him.

The motivation for the appointment of witnesses by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and their number

The Bayānī sources all report that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's concealment from the public during the Baghdad era was the motivating factor for the appointment of the witnesses so that they would act as his intermediaries with the generality of the Bābīs. For example, Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī (d. 1869-70), who was a witness of the Bayān himself, has recounted that due to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's incognito status in Baghdad, and given the Bāb's instructions, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal appointed witnesses so that the Bābīs may relay their questions and concerns over to him through them.⁴³ In the view of this eminent figure, the witnesses of the Bayān acted as the main point of recourse for the Bābīs during this period "...of the minor occultation (*ghaybat-i-ṣuḡhrā*) of his holiness the pre-eternal..."⁴⁴ Based on this information, we can draw the appropriate conclusion such that the main role of the witnesses of the Bayān during that phase of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's concealment was for the purpose of guiding the Bābīs while Ṣubḥ-i-Azal himself remained physically out of the community's reach. Moreover, it should be underscored that in the appointment of these witnesses Ṣubḥ-i-Azal relied on the very same instructions specified in the Bāb's will and testament -- that is, the pivotal position of the witnesses in a period when the mirrors are physically absent -- as the basis for such appointments. Additionally, we should also note here (as a tangential but closely related point), that one of the implied reasons for Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's own seclusion from the public, especially given the circumstances of the time, was to give effect to the Bāb's other instruction in that same will and testament that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal protect his own life at all costs.⁴⁵

⁴³ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 163-4.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 204 (203 in digital edition).

⁴⁵ In the *Book of the Sleeper Awakened* (*kitāb-i-mustayqiz*) (n.d., n.p.), among the countless items he quotes from the Bāb, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal also cites one of the Bāb's counsels to him stating, "...Verily the Pre-Eternal (*al-azal*) should protect himself even if there not be a single person to believe in him throughout all the worlds...", online, <http://bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=must&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 1, 2015), 382 (digital pagination at 387).

Now, at the beginning of his residency in Baghdad, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal appointed seven to eight prominent Bābīs as witnesses and instructed his followers to submit themselves to them. Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī Bahā’u’llāh and his successor ‘Abbās Effendī ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ (d. 1921), as well as Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī (a leading Bahā’ī from Bahā’u’llāh’s lifetime), have likewise indicated the existence of this seven-man group in their accounts.⁴⁶ Sa’id Khān Kursdistānī⁴⁷ has also referred to the witnesses, pointing out the “...the seven-man ‘ulamā among the Bābīs...”⁴⁸ However, we are also faced with a bit of a conundrum as to the specific number here because even though virtually all of the secondary sources (Bayānī and Bahā’ī alike) specifically mention a ‘seven-man’ body -- emphasizing this number *seven* repeatedly -- the text of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* itself actually transmits to us eight names. So in this study this ostensibly perplexing detail is hyphenated as the *seven-eight* man body.⁴⁹ More will be said about

⁴⁶ Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī Bahā’u’llāh *kitāb-i-badī‘* (The Book of Originating Wonder) (n.d., n.p.), online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bahatext.htm> (18 September 18, 2017), 295; ‘Abd’ul-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī *mā’idih-i-āsmānī* (the Celestial Table), vol. 5 (n.p.: 129 *badī‘*/1972-3 CE), 290; Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih* (treatise), CUL, E.G. Browne Collection, F.57(9), 72. It should briefly be noted here that during the post-1892 period Dahajī sided with the Unitarian Bahā’īs (and their allies among Bahā’u’llāh’s former partisans) against ‘Abd’ul-Bahā’.

⁴⁷ He was a physician, a Sunnī Muslim convert to Christianity and an independent early to mid twentieth century scholar of Bābism and Bahā’ism living in Iran who was closely acquainted with many of the Bayānīs and Bahā’īs of his time. The contents of the William M. Miller Bābī MSS collection at Princeton University originally belonged to him. See Miller’s references to him in *The Bahā’ī Faith: Its History and Teachings* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974): *passim*, but esp. 23, 24, and 289; *idem*, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids: 1960); also see the biography by Jay M. Rasooli and Cady H. Allen *Dr. Sa’eed of Iran: The Kurdish physician to Princes and Peasants, Nobles and Nomads* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1957); more recently see, William McCants and Kavian Milani ‘The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of *Nuqtat al-kaf* Dated 1268 (1851-2)’, *passim*.

⁴⁸ Sa’id Khān Kursdistānī *Kursdistānī Notes*, CO285, box 4, 9, online, http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/Kurdistani_Notes.pdf (accessed October 18, 2017). It should be noted that Shoghi Effendi’s statement in *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1944), 233, that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal appointed eighteen witnesses on the pattern of the Letters of the Living, eleven of whom later rejected Ṣubḥ-i-Azal for Bahā’u’llāh, is a false and misleading statement; see also MacEoin *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 388-9.

⁴⁹ Presumably the number seven would hold the most symbolic significance here since, among other reasons, it is the number of letters in the Bāb’s name, ‘Alī Muḥammad, which holds immense letterist significance for Bābism (mainly due to its *abjad* numerical value of 202 being equivalent to *rabb*, lord; and, moreover, because the heptad instances the levels of being/existence in Bābism as well as the precise number of ciphers in the symbol of the Greatest Name/Seven Seals). Note as well that, among sundry other titles, the Bāb designated himself as the ‘Essence of the Seven Letters’ (*dhāt ḥurūf saba‘a*). Likewise the sevenfold hierarchical schema of knowledge so pivotal to Shaykhism (as well as Twelver Shi‘i gnosis in general) -- which is *tawhīd* (divine unicity), *ma‘ānī* (meanings), *abwāb* (gates), *imāma* (imamate), *arkān* (pillars), *nuqabā’* (directors) and *nujabā’* (nobles) -- is central to Bābī thinking as well, particularly as adumbrated in the 1845-6 Epistle of Justice (*ṣaḥīfa ‘adliya*); this, also because it is held to correspond with the sevenfold creative attributive imprints (*khiṣāl*) detailed in the imāmī ḥadīth: i.e. *mashī‘a* (will), *irāda* (volition), *qadar* (determination), *qaḍā’* (authorization), *idhn* (permission) -- or, alternatively, *imḍā’* (realization) -- *ajall* (allotted time) and *kitāb* (book), see also *kitab-i-panj sha’n*, 102. Furthermore, in the Persian Bayān (2:8) seven is the precise number of persons who are allowed to inherit from the dead as well as being the number of permutations each derived root of any given divine name, according to the Bāb, can take in Arabic. However, both MSS have left us with this numerical conundrum where it is difficult to resolve with complete certainty as to whether or not one of the individuals named in it was intended as a deputy to his Witness brother rather than a full Witness. However, as we shall see, in the relevant section the text does not clarify matters at all -- in fact it obscures them further -- by likening the relationship of these two appointees (both brothers) to Moses

this point presently below, but here before going any further to identify the individuals involved, as a necessary detour, let us now first turn to a discussion of the two MSS of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* itself which are presently at our disposal, its authenticity, as well as the style and overall contents of the work.

The two MSS of the *kitāb al-waṣīya*, its authenticity, style and general contents

As mentioned above, the specific collection of epistles by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal addressed to each of the individual members of the seven-eight man body of witnesses to the Bayān -- wherein each of the nominated individuals has been elevated to the rank of witness (*shahīd*) -- is entitled the *kitāb al-waṣīya* (the Book of the Testament). Also as indicated, two MSS of this work are presently known to exist as of this writing. The first is a handwritten copy made by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's grandson Aḥmad Thamariḥ (Misbāḥ al-Ḥukamā') (d. 1940-41) from an earlier copy in the possession of Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahānī (d. 1930).⁵⁰ Copied in a modified and persianized *naskhī-thulūth*, it is dated Wednesday, the nineteenth of Ābān 1316 solar (10 November 1937) which corresponds to the sixth of Ramaḍān 1356 AH (see Fig. 1-3 below at the end of the article). It consists of eighty-seven folios and (except for two pages: 38 and 58)⁵¹ is paginated at **1b** from 1 to 168. The second MS is in the hand of Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī (d. 1963),⁵²

and Aaron (and hence an implied unit) with both being denoted as witnesses rather than only one. A possible resolution based on some hypothetical conjecture is offered presently below.

⁵⁰ An anti-Qājār political activist before and during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-09), Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahani was one of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's trusted couriers between Cyprus and Iran who was also one of E.G. Browne's important Bābī contacts. A sample of one of his correspondences with Browne can be found in the MS of *hasht bihiṣht* (the Eight Paradises) at CUL, Browne Collection, F.53(10). Besides his activism, Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahani was also known as a prolific copyist of Bābī texts. Approximately around the time after the 1896 assassination of Nāsiruddīn Shāh, he married the widow of Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī (d. 1896) who was one of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's daughters. His father Mīrzā Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Munajjim-Bāshī had met the Bāb in Isfahan (1846-47) and there converted to Bābism. Bearing from Ṣubḥ-i-Azal the titles *ism allāh al-ḥāmī* (the name of God, the defender) and *ism allāh al-amīn* (the name of God, the trustworthy), Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahānī is also the author of *dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* (Reasons for the Perplexed), a work of Bayānī apologia written against the Bahā'īs which Sa'īd Khān Kursdistānī characterized as one of the most decisive, "teeth-shattering" refutations of Bahā'ism ever penned, online, <http://www.bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=dalil&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 12, 2017). A MS of *dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* copied in the hand of Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Kātib (Ismā'īl Ṣabbāgh) Sidih'i (d. 1921) can be found at Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 258, Volume 34. For Kursdistānī's comments see the hyperlink to *Kursdistānī's Notes* in the note above. We should also mention here that one of Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahānī's handwritten MSS of the Persian Bayān was among those utilized as the basis for the 1946 lithograph edition, see Nāsir Dawlatābādī's entry on him in *kātibān-i-bayān* (the Scribes of the Bayān) (n.d., n.p.). Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi is to be thanked for detailing some of Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahānī's biography from an ongoing, unpublished work (untitled).

⁵¹ P. 73-74 of folios **37-8** have also been mislabelled with (73) repeated as (72). For convenience, here we are labelling folio **37b** as (72.2). The correct pagination (84) continues again on folio **43a** on the right hand side of the top margin (but does not proceed consistently in the rest of the MS with any uniformity) side by side with the mislabelled number at top center (i.e. 83) and ends at folio **64a** well after the *kitāb al-waṣīya*, at which point the MS continues on till its conclusion with the skipped page numbers in place.

⁵² For details regarding this prominent twentieth century Bayānī figure of Iran and a Witness, and apparently one of only two members of the large Karīm Khānī Shaykhī clan of Kirman who converted to Bābism, see Nūriddīn Chahārdehī *bāb kīst va sukhān-i-ū chīst* (Who is the Bāb and what are his words?) (Tehran: sāzmān va intishārāt-i-

copied in a *naskhī* shorthand scrawl, and is dated the second of Ābān 1328 solar (24 October 1949). It consists of twenty-one *folios* and is paginated at **2a** from 1 to 40, with **1a** being the copyist's opening note and colophon (see **Fig. 4-6** below at the end of this article). When cited below these two are indicated as **MS** (1) and **MS** (2) respectively, and here they will be cited according to the copyists own paginations rather than modern foliation. It is noted here that the present author only possesses digital scans of these two **MSS** and not the originals which are from a private collection belonging to a contemporary Bayānī in Iran. However, in the interests of scholarly balance, scans of both these **MSS** have been uploaded by the present author in full on the internet as **PDFs**.⁵³

While our first **MS** would appear to be double the length of the second, in fact the contents of (1-109/110) of **MS** (1) and (1-40) of **MS** (2) are identical; that is, *sans* a few minor irregularities where the copyist of the second has sometimes corrected a few instances of (almost unnoticeable) solecisms in Arabic whereas the first (which itself was copied from the older **MS** of Ḥājji Mīrzā Amīn Isfahānī) has left them in place. In the center of line eleven of page (109)⁵⁴ in **MS** (1), the copyist has labelled the conclusion of the epistle with "*khātimih-i-kitāb al-waṣīya*" whereas in **MS** (2) the copyist there has concluded their **MS** after the last word with a somewhat crudely marked 'x'. **MS** (1) occurs at eleven lines per page while **MS** (2) stands at twenty-four. After the *kitāb al-waṣīya*, **MS** (1) then continues on for another fifty-seven pages with a series of five extrinsic items from the writings of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (with all five being in the same genre as the *kitāb al-waṣīya*): items which are not in the scope of the present study to fully detail, only to say that the fourth and final items appear to be taken from Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's 1853-4 *kitāb-i-nūr* (the Book of Light).⁵⁵

That stated, it would appear that the *kitāb al-waṣīya* is in fact the *kitāb-i-thānī* ("the second book") labelled in the handwritten (partial) list of the titles of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's works provided by his son Riḍvān-^cAlī to E.G. Browne in March 1896 and which is found in CUL **MS** Browne **F.25** (**265a-b**, item 4).⁵⁶ The case for this *kitāb-i-thānī* being

fathī, 1363 solar/1984 CE), *passim*, but especially 31 and 57. A retired judge, according to Chahārdehī's account of him, Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī considered himself to be the "return" (*rij'at*) of Imām Ḥasan (ibid. 57). His status as a Witness of the Bayān is obliquely confirmed in his last will and testament, a digital scan of which (sans the concluding page[s]) is privately held by the author of the present article. According to Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi (Skype, 2016) he was appointed to the rank by Ḥājji Mīrzā Siyyid Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī (d. 1939) which in itself indicates that in the absence of mirrors the witnesses of the Bayān appointed other witnesses of the Bayān in an apostolic succession. For more on Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, see below.

⁵³ **MS** (1) online https://archive.org/details/kitabalwasiya_subhiazal_MS1_4449 (accessed March 14, 2018) and **MS** (2) online https://archive.org/details/kitabalwasiya_subhiazal_MS2 (accessed March 14, 2018).

⁵⁴ Which is actually 110.

⁵⁵ This would tend to bolster the case for the whole compendium being a copy of a **MS** of the early writings of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal after the *aḥmadiya*. For more briefly on this, see note below.

⁵⁶ See the eighth entry down on the right-hand column below the heading on **265a**. This is the inventory that later formed the basis of Browne's own partial list in 'Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection at Zanjan in 1850', *JRAS*, vol. 29 (1897): 764-66. The first book, and written in 1850-1 not too long after the execution of the Bāb is, of course, the *aḥmadiya* -- a work divided into 53 *sūrahs* and each opening with its own unique benediction formula and originally addressed to a Bābī named Aḥmad (possibly the first witness named below), hence the title -- which

the *kitāb al-waṣīya* is moreover strengthened by the fact that this “second book” is clearly identified by Riḍvān-‘Alī as being an item (he specifies it as a *lawḥ*, i.e. a ‘tablet’ or ‘epistle’) within the grade of ‘verses’ (*āyāt*) which is precisely what the *kitāb al-waṣīya* is. Without naming the title, the Bahā’ī source of Mahdī Dahajī’s *risālih* also confirms the authenticity of the original text of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* wherein he explicitly states that during the period under question Ṣubḥ-i-Azal composed seven letters or epistles to seven individuals whom he appointed as witnesses of the Bayān (...*haft maktūb bi-haft nafar nivisht va ānhā-rā shahīd-i-bayān khwānd...*),⁵⁷ this literally being the explicit nature of the contents of the *kitāb al-waṣīya*.⁵⁸ Furthermore, and on the basis of a single MS (namely, our MS (2) here), in 2013 Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi’s faculty of supervisors at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran broadly accepted the overall authenticity of this document and its original attribution to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal during the course of the author’s defense of his MA thesis.⁵⁹

Stylistically the *kitāb al-waṣīya* occupies the status of the *first grade* (*sha’n awwal*) in which the founder of Bābism divided his own writings (and implicitly of his successor as well), that is to say, Arabic verses in imitation of the Qur’ān.⁶⁰ As we shall see in the translated citations of it below, it replicates all the imperious scriptural tones, imposing resonances of language, elevated diction, elliptic sonorousness, imagery, refrains and ambiguities that such a style might involve, replete throughout with the usage of the first person plural ‘we’: a style that would have surely evoked enrapturement from its devoted Bābī recipients while almost certainly enraging its orthodox Muslim detractors (past and present) beyond measure. In his claim to complete spiritual identity with the Bāb as his appointed Mirror, in the *kitāb al-waṣīya* Ṣubḥ-i-Azal also scrupulously mimics within his own scriptural Arabic all of the Bāb’s diction and syntax, idiosyncratic turns of phraseology, stylisms and expressions -- including many of the same solecisms of grammar as well -- to perfection. This is also the case with the earlier *aḥmadiya* as well as the subsequent *kitāb-i-nūr*. It is noted that both this piece and the earlier *aḥmadiya* are relatively shorter works by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s standards, with the *kitāb-i-nūr* which came after it running well over 850 pages in length in two existent autograph MSS.

is also stylistically composed in the *first grade* (*sha’n awwal*). This is deduced based on the paucity of information regarding any other known titles occurring between the compositions of the *aḥmadiya* and this particular piece; and, moreover, that none of the existing lists of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s works -- whether by Browne, his kin or anyone else -- mentions the *kitāb al-waṣīya* independently of this ‘second book’.

⁵⁷ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih* (treatise), CUL, E.G. Browne Collection, F.57(9), 72, lines four and five.

⁵⁸ The date of Dahajī’s *risālih* to E.G. Browne is 1914, see (ed.) R.A. Nicholson *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. belonging to the late E.G. Browne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), F.57 (9), 78.

⁵⁹ Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi (email, 13 March 2018).

⁶⁰ The pentadic division (or the ‘five grades’) of the writings of the Bayānī scriptural corpus were divided by the Bāb as follows: 1. *āyāt* (Arabic verses in imitation of the Qur’ān); 2. *munājāt* (doxologies, prayers and invocations, i.e. in Arabic); 3. *khuṭba* (sermons, i.e. in Arabic), or, alternatively, *shu’ūn-i-‘ilmīya* (scientific and philosophical treatises); 4. *tafsīr* (scriptural commentary, i.e. in Arabic), and 5. *fārsī* (works in Persian), see the table of contents of *kitāb-i-panj sha’n* where this scheme is detailed as the sub-divisions within each chapter.

The *kitāb al-waṣīya* begins with two benediction formulas.⁶¹ There are seven (albeit undemarcated) overall subdivisions to the work which have been isolated here as the beginning of the address to each Witness (labelled below). It does not contain a postscript and ends at the conclusion of what is presumed to be the section addressing the final Witness (i.e. Hādī). The majority of the work's content is in the form of continuously running doxologies praising the divine (many of them repetitious), usually involving novel variations on quranic ones (or versions of those originally novelized by the Bāb), with information spliced in between these in the form of an address to each of the individuals concerned. Other themes include (i.) *divine* admonishment and chastisement; (ii.) promises of eventual victory to the Bābīs and the ultimate defeat of their enemies; (iii.) lamentation and glorification of the state of those who have perished (i.e. the Bābī martyrs); (iv.) exhortations as well as condemnations of an ethical nature; (v.) the general state of the *believers*, including fence-sitters and turn-coats; (vi.) brief reflections on the author's own current situation at the time and his eventual fate (especially as it pertains to the post-mortem situation of his physical body); (vii.) the final burial places to be determined for the Bāb and his Letters of the Living; (viii.) prophecies about the future, especially regarding "he whom God shall make manifest" (*man yuḏhiruhu'llāh*); and, (ix.) obviously some concrete (albeit scanty in details but nevertheless comprehensive in scope) instructions of a general nature to the witnesses. Occasionally there are also some other autobiographical tidbits of information offered by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, one which occurs early where he mentions the death of one of his children with another being in Isfahan.⁶² Finally here, we note that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal would have been approximately twenty-one to twenty-two years of age when the *kitāb al-waṣīya* was first composed.

But for now let us return to the subject at hand: the witnesses of the Bayān.

The period of the appointment of the *seven-eight* man body of witnesses to the Bayān and their responsibilities

Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī, mentioned above, claims that the commencement of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's period of concealment from the public occurred after the appointment of the witnesses to the Bayān.⁶³ Likewise Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī's account confirms that the appointment of the witnesses to the Bayān marked the beginning of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's

⁶¹ The work begins at **MS** (1) 1; **MS** (2), 2, as such: "He is God, high be the tremendousness of his remembrance (*hūwa allāh taʿālā ʿizza dhikrahu*)! In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful! This is an illuminated book revealed by God the tremendous, the wise, detailing what has been ordained upon his servant; in it is light and counsel for the God fearing..."

⁶² Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1): 14; **MS** (2): 6. This would have more than likely been one of the children who died in infancy from his first wife Fāṭima whom he permanently left behind in Iran when he was forced flee to Iraq. For general information, see online, <http://www.bayanic.com/lib/typed/hist/AzalHist/Subh-bio-Eng.htm> (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁶³ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 164; Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārīkh-i-firqī-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 6-8.

period of seclusion in Baghdad.⁶⁴ This means that the composition of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* itself can be located in Iraq where its seven group of epistles may have been independently composed sometime during the early stages of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's residency there; and this is borne out by a statement made in the first few pages of the *kitāb al-waṣīya*: "...Say, verily the servant of God has entered a land where no one humbles themselves before the living, the tremendous, the evident [meaning Ṣubḥ-i-Azal himself – trans.]...."⁶⁵ On the basis that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal began his term of isolation from the public at the beginning of his residency in Baghdad, it can be inferred that the appointment of this seven-eight man body of witnesses must have occurred sometime during the first year of his residency in Iraq (approximately 1268 AH/1852 CE and 1269 AH/1853 CE).⁶⁶

On the *incipit* of both **MSS** of this work (occurring as the heading in the first and vertically on the right-hand margin of the text in the second) the opening declaration of the work states, "This is the book of my testament regarding the appointment of the witnesses so that perchance the people may be guided to the signs/verses of God!" The phrasing in this opening declaration of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* is quite telling as it shows the primary motivation for the election of the witnesses to the Bayān, and that is, expressly for guiding "the people" to the religion of the Bāb.⁶⁷ In these epistles Ṣubḥ-i-Azal has delineated the duties he has deemed incumbent upon the witnesses; and, in language iterative of both the Qur'ān as well as high imamology, he has likewise declared that these epistles composing the *kitāb al-waṣīya* -- as well as self-reflexively his own person -- constitute the "book of God" (*kitāb allāh*).⁶⁸ This specific assertion is indicative that in the view of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal the appointment of these witnesses was a divine afflatus and heavenly fiat which had "surged through the

⁶⁴ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih*, 72.

⁶⁵ *Kitāb al-waṣīya*, **MS** (1): 2-3; **MS** (2): 1. Further on in the work he states, "...Verily the one speaking by the permission of his Lord [meaning Ṣubḥ-i-Azal – trans.] is residing in a house where not a single upright, confirmed soul is with him nor is there between his hands a single person to serve him during the night and day, will you not be among the mindful?...Lo, the one reciting to you all [now] the verses of God howsoever he desires is [presently] residing in an old house (*bayt 'atīq*)..." **MS** (1): 27; **MS** (2): 11. A form of this plaint -- or refrain -- is repeated again at **MS** (1): 50; **MS** (2): 20. This means that neither Bahā'ullāh (who was meant to act as Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's official protector and chief steward at this stage) nor any of the other members of the Nūrī household had as yet arrived in Baghdad when the *kitāb al-waṣīya* was first composed.

⁶⁶ *Hasht bihisht*, 300-301/214 (PDF: 231).

⁶⁷ Note, for example, the imagery of the following passage here: "...Verily those who have been guided by the verses of God and have believed in the remembrance of God [i.e. the Bāb], sincerely steadfastly, they are the companions of felicity (*aṣḥāb al-na'īm*) circumambulating around whom are the *hourīs* (*ḥūrīyāt*) who have been created from the light of the merciful (*nūr al-raḥmān*)..." *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1) 21; **MS** (2): 9.

⁶⁸ *Kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1): 16, 49, 58, 73 and 93 (falsely labelled 92); **MS** (2): 7, 19, 23, 27 and 34. To wit, "...this is the book of God speaking amongst you in truth..." With different phrasing, he also states "...this is our book speaking amongst you in truth..." **MS** (1): 12; **MS** (2): 5. Elsewhere Ṣubḥ-i-Azal asserts, "...Verily God, indeed, has revealed the verses of the book by the truth so that likewise all things may embrace it in a book illuminated..." **MS** (1): 18; **MS** (2): 7. As well, "...Verily God has revealed the book by the truth. In it are perspicuous signs (*āyāt bayānāt*) and a peroration [or 'sermon/teaching'] (*mu'āza*) for the God fearing...Indeed God has revealed the verses/signs (*al-āyāt*) by the truth. In it is a peroration [or 'sermon/teaching'] (*mu'āza*) and a mercy (*raḥma*) for the believers..." **MS** (1) 20; **MS** (2): 8.

tongue” (or, rather, from the pen) of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as its vehicle. In a section of this work, reiterating the Bāb, he writes that if someone like himself (i.e. a possessor of divine tokens/signs and verses, *ṣāhib al-āyāt*) should not appear, the cause of the religion of the Bayān resides with its witnesses.⁶⁹

To that end, the duties and obligations which he then impresses upon these witnesses of the Bayān to uphold are as follows:

1. Guidance of the people to -- as well as those already in -- the religion of the Bayān;⁷⁰
2. Collecting and maintaining the entire corpus of the Bāb’s writings (i.e. the Bayān proper and everything composed before and after it) and those of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal himself (i.e. the corpus of the Bayān’s vivified animation, *ḥayy al-bayān*);⁷¹ and
3. Collecting the Bābī tithes (or rather, “fifths,” *khums*) from the Bābīs which has also been termed here “the right of God” (*huqūq allāh*);⁷²

These threefold duties detailed above are demonstrative of the comprehensive nature of the leadership envisaged by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal for the witnesses of the Bayān over the rank and file Bābīs. The previous account related above by Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī is likewise illustrative of the fact that these witnesses were acting as the primary intermediaries for communication between Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and the generality of the Bābīs. According to all the Bayānī accounts, at this stage Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī Bahāʾullāh was acting as his younger step-brother’s steward, his “...vicegerent and chief guardian...” (*nāyib-i-manāb va naqīb*) wherein he was accounted as “...leader over all...” (*raʾīs bar kull*) and “...in outward appearances, whatever occurred, it was by him; and whenever anything was going on, it was always him doing it...”⁷³ Be that as it may,

⁶⁹ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 3, 11, 12 and 69; MS (2): 2, 4, 5 and 26: “...Say, verily, after me the cause/command (*al-amr*) is in the hands of the witnesses should there not arise one like me possessed of proof whereby appearing to him from God is the established sign/verse (*āya mubrahina*)...” (ibid. 69/26).

⁷⁰ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 4, 8, 16 and 99 (falsely labelled 98); MS (2): 2, 3, 7, 28 and 37. On this point, he collectively addresses the witnesses and says to them, “Say, fear God, O concourse of men (*yā malāʾ al-rijāl*), and do not become among the tarriers...” MS (1): 19; MS (2): 8.

⁷¹ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 12, 54, 77 (incorrectly labelled 76), 104 (incorrectly labelled 103); MS (2): 5, 21, 29 and 37. To wit, “...We command you to collect everything which has been revealed in the Bayān [meaning all of the writings of the Bāb – trans.] and everything that has been revealed by the vivified animation of the Bayān so that you may be [accounted] among the beneficent. That is what will benefit you in [or ‘until’] the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*), the day the people shall rise up for the lord of the worlds...” (ibid.)

⁷² *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 13, 24-25, 54, 72, 97 (incorrectly labelled 96) and 98 (incorrectly labelled 97); MS (2): 6, 10, 21, 27 and 35: “...and you are indeed commanded to take [or ‘collect’] the right of God (*huqūq allāh*)...” Compare this specific terminology regarding the Bābī tithe with the same one in Bahāʾuʾllāh’s 1872-3 *kitāb-i-aqdas*.

⁷³ Shaykh Maḥdī Baḥr al-ʿUlūm Kirmānī’s marginalia and commentary on *tarjumah-i-tārīkh-i-bābīyih* (A translation of a history of the Bābī movement into Persian from Russian), Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 261, vol. 36, folio 47a (original pagination: 91): “By reason of the [the instructions in the] Bāb’s will and testament, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was required to conceal and protect himself; and the track record of servitude, obeisance, deference and obedience by Mīrzā Ḥusayn-ʿAlī [Bahāʾullāh] exceeded and was

among the witnesses of the Bayān he held no official position or formal rank whatsoever.⁷⁴

The seven-eightfold witnesses of the Bayān

In the *kitāb al-waṣīya* Ṣubḥ-i-Azal only mentions in code the first names of the witnesses to the Bayān and their places of residence. These individuals (eight specifically named [!]) are the following names indicated below. Along with these first names delineated, translated segments from the address to each of them will also be quoted here and in the chronological order in which they appear in the *kitāb al-waṣīya*.

- i. Aḥmad (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *khā'* [ز]):

...this is the book from God unto the one who is mentioned by the name Aḥmad, revealed in the presence of one wise, well-informed. O Aḥmad, prostrate to your Lord who has irradiated you [with light], and do not appear among the associators (*mushrikīn*). Verily we have made you to be in our presence a Witness among those whom we have sated and to those who have prostrated before God the living, the ancient... O Aḥmad, this is the book of your Lord. Present it before your hands in order to learn thereby what God has intended in the mighty tablet...We command whosoever is in the land [of the letter] *khā'* to present themselves before you and so that they may become among the quickened...⁷⁵

As an important historical side note to this section; a point which may shed some further light on why Aḥmad may have been appointed as a Witness, or rather why Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was filling positions and elevating individuals in the then dwindling ranks of senior Bābīs of the early period who were at the time being killed off one by one;

better than most. For this reason, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal established him as vicegerent and chief guardian and leader over all; and whosoever from whatsoever place would enter [Baghdad], would [first] enter his [presence]; and the petitions and correspondences of any person, from whatever place, would [first] enter into his hands and he would [also then] produce the response to its recipient [as well]; and likewise the funds of the right of God (*wujūh-i-ḥaqq allāh*) and the imām's share (*sahm-i-imām*) that arrived from whatever place, were surrendered over to him; and the totality of all charged and derived expenses and domestic costs were also with him [i.e. his responsibility]; and in outward appearances, whatever occurred, it was by him; and whenever anything was going on, it was always him doing it" (ibid.) Although the copyist for this **MS** was Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Kātib, a few sections of its commentary and marginalia have been cryptically sealed with [١٤٠٠] as the signature. This may in fact be the signature of Shaykh Maḥdī Baḥr al-ʿUlūm Kirmānī. In 2015 Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi forwarded to the present author a digital scan of a letter by Shaykh Maḥdī Baḥr al-ʿUlūm Kirmānī which has been signed in precisely such manner (email, 2015).

⁷⁴ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 121.

⁷⁵ *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1): 3-4, 7; **MS** (2): 1-2, 3.

further into the beginning of this section Şubḥ-i-Azal directly addresses events then unfolding against the Bābīs of Tehran while also mentioning (quite possibly) Mullā ‘Abd’ul-Karīm Qazvīnī (one of the eminent scribes and couriers of the Bāb) who met his fate and was killed by the artillerymen of Nāşiruddīn Shāh’s royal bodyguard following the events in the summer of 1852:

...and indeed previously we sent over to you in the land of [the letter] *ṭā’* [Tehran] Karīm so that he may act as the learned among the people [note: here Şubḥ-i-Azal is asserting his complete identity with the Bāb since he was the one who had originally instructed Mullā ‘Abd’ul-Karīm Qazvīnī to go to Tehran from Chihriq in 1850 – trans.] Yet at this time we have also heard what has befallen the believers in the land of Rey at the hands of the oppressing tyrants. Upon those who have been martyred in the path of your Lord, may there be the blessings of their Lord, for they are among the well-assured. And [as for] those who have without any right killed the saints/vicegerents of God (*awlīyā allāh*)...upon them be the damnation of their Lord, for they are among the companions of the fire and are those who are indeed [estimated as being] within it [i.e. the fire]...⁷⁶

ii. Muḥammad Ṭaqī (the brother of Aḥmad):

...and indeed we have determined in the book of God that he who is mentioned as Ṭaqī after Muḥammad present himself between your hands [i.e. Aḥmad’s], for he is in our presence a Witness secure [or ‘accounted’] among the learned. Verily, O Muḥammad before Ṭaqī, we have made you a Witness in our presence in order to call everyone to God, your Lord, and so that they may make the religion of God victorious and become amongst the well-guided...for, lo, to us he [i.e.

⁷⁶ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 5-6, 10; MS (2) 2-3. For Mullā ‘Abd’ul-Karīm Qazvīnī, see online, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/notes/qazvini9.htm> (accessed October 6, 2017), although we caution the reader regarding its reliance on the narrative of Zarandī. On the Letters of the Living, in MS (1) 31; MS (2) Şubḥ-i-Azal counsels the witnesses about the final resting places of those foremost disciples of the Bāb, saying “...And indeed God has elevated for you [i.e. the witnesses] the seats of the Living [i.e. the final resting places of the Bāb’s eighteen Letters of the Living] (*maqā’id al-ḥayy*) so do not become among the aggressors...,” (ibid.) also see MS (1) 86 (incorrectly labelled 85); MS (2) 32. Further on in MS (1) 31; MS (2) 12 he says, “...Say, surely God shall seize [with violence] those who have done whatever they have wanted on the earth and without any right killed the proofs of your Lord [i.e. the Letters of the Living] (*adillā’ rabbika*)...” Yet in MS (1) 37; MS (2) 15 the promise of divine forgiveness is also offered to the Muslim persecutors of the Bāb’s disciples should these persecutors sincerely repent of their actions: “...Verily God forgives all sins if you fear God and seek his forgiveness [plural – trans.], O you Muslims; this is how we inform you, if you truly be of the well-guided...” And in a quite interesting attempt to quell any rising sentiments of sectarian anti-Muslim Bābī militancy, on MS (1) 41; MS (2) 16 he exhorts his followers with these words: “...Fear God and do not show infidelity towards God in regard to your previous [form of the] call to prayer as Muslims, for God, he is the real truth, and he is the protector, the peerless self-subsistent...”

Muḥammad Ṭaqī] is like Aaron in the mighty tablet; and indeed our name Aḥmad [‘the most praised’ being a divine attribute – trans.] is like his brother Moses, mentioned in our presence as being among the learned. Fear God, O Aḥmad, and do not find yourself among the tarriers. And fear God, O Muḥammad before Ṭaqī, and do not find yourself among the ignorant. Verily, indeed, we have determined for the both of you the good in the book so that you may become among those who rejoice; and we have made the both of you in our presence to be witnesses to the worlds [or, among the learned – trans.] Whosoever presents themselves before the two of you, it is as if they had presented themselves before God the sultan, the wise...Verily we have made the two of you in our presence to be a light in order to guide whosoever is in the darkness, and we have caused you to be well-guided...Likewise tell your brother [addressing Aḥmad – trans.] that after me the cause/command (*al-amr*) [i.e. the religion of the Bayān] is in the hands of the witnesses...The cause/command is in your hands after the sun’s setting in regard to that which you have invoked [or ‘remembered/mentioned’] of the signs/verses of God [meaning Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and his death – trans.]; and after [the time] when a firm soul has not arisen [meaning another Mirror – trans.]; unto the moment of the manifestation of ‘he whom God shall make manifest’ (*man yuḏhiruhu’Llāh*) at which time the cause/command is in his hands [who] will do whatsoever he wills and decree whatsoever he desires...⁷⁷

- iii. Muḥammad (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *bā’* [ب]).

...Verily this is the book in our presence unto the one who is mentioned by the name Muḥammad in the land [of the letter] *bā’*, revealed in the presence of one wise, praiseworthy. Lo, O Muḥammad, we have made you to be a Witness in our presence so that you may guide everyone to [the path] of the straight justice (*‘adl al-mustaqīm*) and that you make victorious the cause/command of God, your Lord, and so that you may be amongst the beneficent. Indeed we have guided you and we have taught you the straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*)...⁷⁸

Further on into the text, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal instructs him to collect the Bābī tithes, saying to him:

⁷⁷ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 7-9, 11; MS (2): 3-4, 5.

⁷⁸ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1): 15-16, 24; MS (2): 6-7, 10.

...O Muḥammad, we have determined in the book of God that you [collectively addressing the witnesses here – trans.] take what is of the right of God (*ḥuqūq allāh*) and deliver it into our hands so that you may become among the quickened...and we have determined that after my passing when I have ascended to my Lord that my remains [or ‘bones’] be buried and that you [collectively to the witnesses – trans.] elevate [the space of] that most splendid seat (*al-maq‘ad al-abhā’*) and that you become among the invokers...and if I am martyred in the path of my Lord, what remains to you is what is buried of my [bodily] remnant [or ‘bones’], so do not become among those who tarry, for indeed God has determined death upon every soul and that is the predetermination of the tremendous, the knowing...⁷⁹

- iv. Ja‘far (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *kāf* [ك]).

...This is the wondrous originating book (*kitāb al-badī’*) within the well-guarded tablet (*lawḥ al-mahfūz*) unto the one who is mentioned by the name Ja‘far in the land of [the letter] *kāf*...Verily, O Ja‘far, indeed we have made you to be in our presence a Witness in order to make your Lord victorious, who, no other God is there besides him, [is] the protector, the peerless self-subsistent. I testify that there is no other God but him; that the Primal Point [i.e. the Bāb] is his servant and his splendor; and that the proofs of the Living [i.e. the Letters of the Living] (*adillā’ al-ḥayy*) are the letters of his logos-self (*ḥurūf li-nafsihi*)...and indeed we have made you in our presence to be a Witness in order that you may guide the people from out of the threefold darkness so that perchance everyone may be guided by the signs/verses of God. Collect what is of our right (*ḥuqūqinā*) from all around and present it between our hands...Verily God and his angels send blessings upon the Point [i.e. the Bāb] (*nuqṭa*) and those among the witnesses [even ‘martyrs’ – trans.] (*shuhadā’*) after him. Say, O those who have believed, send blessings upon them so that perchance you will be shown mercy. Lo, God has appointed you in truth so that perchance you may be mindful...Verily, O Ja‘far, how many days have gone by, lo, we are of the observers. We have not beheld any soul prostrating before God the protector, the peerless self-subsistent. We have fashioned their [very] souls yet their actions are like air as in the day they were as nothing, do you not understand? Those who have shown infidelity to God and his signs/verses, they are the losers...and,

⁷⁹ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1) 24-26; MS (2) 10.

lo, those who have believed in God and his signs/verses and have followed the truth when it came to them, they are the believers, they are the witnesses of the truth in justice, and they are the ones who shall return to God...⁸⁰

- v. Ibrāhīm (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *tā'* [ت]):

...This is the wondrous originating book within the hidden tablet (*lawḥ al-maknūn*) unto the one who is mentioned by the name Ibrāhīm in the land of [the letter] *tā'*...indeed we have made you in our presence to be a Witness in order that you may guide everyone by the signs/verses of God so that perchance they may be among the thankful...Verily, O friend (*khalīl*), when I have ascended bury what remains of my bones so that you may become among those who have acted by the command of God; and behold the state of creation and observe with your own eyes what you see so that perchance the people may become well-guided by the signs/verses of God; and if on that day there appears from the people naught but infidelity to God and his signs/verses, lo, those are among the wrongdoers, those are the ones who have openly shown infidelity towards God after previously having been among the believers...⁸¹

- vi. Muḥammad (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *tā'* [ط]).

...This is a wondrous originating tablet from a book set forth, whereof without possessing distortion, its Arabic signs/verses are explained in detail, so that perchance everyone may be well-guided by the signs/verses of God; and this is the book revealed by the truth unto the one mentioned by the name Muḥammad in the land of [the letter] *tā'*...Verily, O this (*yā hadhā*), indeed we have made you in our presence to be a Witness so that you may guide the people by the signs/verses of God that perchance they may become felicitous. Lo, engage in what you behold of the good in our presence so that perchance the people may become thankful; and indeed we have enumerated the signs/verses by the truth unto a folk who are just/balanced...Verily we have revealed it by the truth so that perchance by the signs/verses of God you may be well-guided...Observe the people and their actions and

⁸⁰ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1) 39, 40, 42, 43, 48, 49; MS (2) 16, 17, 19.

⁸¹ *kitāb al-waṣīya* MS (1) 52, 61; MS (2) 20-21, 24.

consider, O possessor of insight, so that perchance everyone may enter the religion of God...and verily fear God and believe in that which shall manifest after me, for verily it is 'he whom God shall make manifest' (*man yuẓhiruhu'llāh*) in truth and with him is a book set forth distinguishing between the wrongdoers/oppressing tyrants, woe betide the infidels...a day whereof will witness the visage of those wrongdoers/oppressing tyrants dammed up and shall behold the countenance of those who have believed brightened by the light, and those at that time shall all rejoice...and he will appear in a moment of negligence amongst you, but none of you will realize it...indeed we have made you to be a witness in our presence to the cause/command so that you will guide the people by the signs/verses of God so that perchance during the days of their Lord they may be mindful....Say, verily those who have shown infidelity to God and what has been revealed in the Bayān, those are the corrupters...⁸²

- vii. Mūsā (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *qāf* [ق]).

...Verily this is the book, tremendous, (*al-kitāb 'azīz*) [originating] from a sealed tablet (*lawḥ al-makhtūm*) unto the one mentioned by the name Mūsā in the land of [the letter] *qāf*...Indeed we have made you in our presence to be a Witness so that you may call the people by the signs/verses of God and counsel them by the book of your Lord so that perchance they may enter the religion of God. Verily God, your Lord, has created you and provided for you and made you to die and enlivened you and resurrected you so that you may testify upon this that indeed no other God is there but he; that the Primal Point (*nuqṭat'ul-ūlā*) [i.e. the Bāb] is his remembrance and his supremacy; that the Letters of the Living are the proofs of his logos-self; [and that] all have been manifested by his command...And certainly indeed the cause of God rises upon the mention/remembrance of 'he whom God shall make manifest' and the offering of blessings upon him and his proofs...Fear God, your Lord the merciful, and arise from your seats whensoever you hear the mention of 'he whom God shall make manifest' if you are [truly] believers...and whosever does not rise from his place when he hears the mention of the proof of his Lord, they are of the wrongdoers and God excoriates them (*allāh barā'a 'anhum*)...Say, those who do not come to believe in 'he whom God shall make

⁸² *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1) 65-66, 67, 68, 76 (incorrectly labelled 75) and 85 (incorrectly labelled 84); **MS** (2) 25, 26, 28 and 31.

manifest’, to them is the loss, even if he [i.e. a non-believer in ‘he whom God shall make manifest’] spends his whole life contemplating his theophanic *parousia*; [but] without sacrificing his very soul between his hands, he has become among the company of those who have killed themselves [i.e. committed spiritual suicide – trans.]⁸³

- viii. Hādī (the witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of [the letter] *qāf* [ق]) .

...Verily this is the impregnable book (*kitāb al-manī*) from a parchment spread out unto the one mentioned by the name Hādī in the land of [the letter] *qāf*...Indeed we have made you in our presence to be a Witness so that you may guide the people by the signs/verses of God so that perchance they will enter the cause of God; and to you, to you (*fa-iyāka fa-iyāka*), do not let it come to pass that it [i.e. the religion of the Bayān – trans.] becomes a cause of sorrow to any soul...Say, this is the book distinguishing among all things in truth and it is a revelation in the presence of one praiseworthy, wise...Say, fear God and do not conceal the signs/verses of God so that perchance you will be shown mercy...Verily, God composed writings through his logos-self, the merciful. Collect them all, in a day whereof there is no doubt, and promote them in truth, verily indeed he is the high, the mighty...Lo, those who do not believe in the encounter with your Lord (*bi-liqā’ rabbika*), to them is the loss...Say, dally in your homes only a short while if you shall [collectively addressing the witnesses – trans.] be witnessing [or ‘be acting as witnesses’ trans.]...Verily, God can give life to the dead and make the revived to die, for he is capable of all things, and he is the tremendous, the best beloved...⁸⁴

With reference to the assorted primary and secondary sources cited here, these individuals can indeed be properly identified.

Aḥmad: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter *khā*

⁸³ *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1) 91 (incorrectly labelled 90), 92 (incorrectly labelled 91), 93 (incorrectly labelled 92), 95 (incorrectly labelled 94); **MS** (2) 33-34, 35.

⁸⁴ *kitāb al-waṣīya* **MS** (1) 103 (incorrectly labelled 102), 104 (incorrectly labelled 103), 105 (incorrectly labelled 104), 106 (incorrectly labelled 105); **MS** (2) 38, 39.

We note that in the terminology of the early Bābīs and Bahā'īs “the land of [the letter] *khā'* [خ]

 indicates Khurāsān.⁸⁵ In his account Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī refers to several prominent Bābīs, a number of whom are witnesses and among which the name of Mīrzā Aḥmad Azghandī has been mentioned.⁸⁶ Elsewhere he again names him as being among the witnesses of the Bayān.⁸⁷

When offering biographies of the prominent Bābīs during the lifetime of the Bāb; in the section devoted to “Khurāsān, the land of *khā'*” in volume three of *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq* (The History of the Manifestation of Truth); the Bahā'ī historian Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī mentions this individual as being among “the celebrated '*ulamā* [and] believers of Khurāsān.” Mīrzā Aḥmad Azghandī studied in Irāq under Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1826) and Siyyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843), and prior to the declaration of the Bāb in 1844 was well-known as being among “...the celebrated Shaykhī '*ulamā* and [among the] companions of the Siyyid [i.e. Kāẓim Rashtī].” During the initial stages of the Bāb's declaration in 1844, he encountered Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī (d. 1849), the Bāb's first believer, and as a result converted to Bābism.⁸⁸ In subsequent years (esp. 1277 AH/1860 CE, i.e. the eighth year of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's residence in Baghdad) he had already distinguished himself as among “the celebrated '*ulamā* of the Bābīs.”⁸⁹

In the *kitāb al-wasīya*'s address to Mīrzā Aḥmad Azghandī, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal also mentions his brother Muḥammad Ṭaqī as a witness of the Bayān but (as we saw above) instead has characterized his role as being like that of “Aaron to Moses.” Given this, the inference must be drawn that Muḥammad Ṭaqī Azghandī was deemed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal to occupy a *spiritual* station underneath his older brother, Mīrzā Aḥmad, but like him also occupied the rank of a Witness. This may partially resolve the enigma around the number eight, but not in any definitively satisfactory manner since he was at one and the same time appointed as a Witness and not in any lesser capacity. Moreover, in all standard Islamic narratives of Aaron, which Bābism itself subscribes to, Aaron is held to occupy the status of a prophet (*nabī*) alongside his brother Moses, albeit just not as a legislative one like the latter.

The only final hypothesis offered at this point as one possible resolution to the *seven-eight* numerical conundrum is that it could also be motivated by the esoteric-gnostic or, rather, the *theophanocratic* concerns of Bābī doctrine revolving specifically (albeit implicitly) around the symbol of the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a'ẓam*); that is to

⁸⁵ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq* (The History of the Manifestation of Truth), vol. 3 (n.p., n.d.), 112; idem *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 3 (n.p., 128 badr/1971-2 CE), 161. All the volumes of both series are available online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/index/diglib/mazand1.htm> (accessed October 16, 2017).

⁸⁶ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 38. These individuals are as follows: **i.** Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, **ii.** Hājji Siyyid Jawād Karbalā'ī, **iii.** Āghā Mīrzā Hādī Qazvīnī, **iv.** Āghā Mīrzā Aḥmad Azghandī, **v.** Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Mutiwwālī-Bāshī Qummī and **vi.** Mīrzā Rajab 'Alī Qahīr.

⁸⁷ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *risālih-i-raddiyya* (Treatise of Refutation), MS, 49; Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-firqi-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 8-9.

⁸⁸ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.3, 153-4.

⁸⁹ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.4, 230.

say, the *seven seals* of Islamo-Kabbalistic theurgy and occultism which plays such a key role in all variations of Shi'i esotericism including Bābism:⁹⁰ an allusion which may be presumed without the need for any further comment but one which the non-initiate cannot readily grasp. No need to mention that as a chief element of praxis the Bābī texts of that era are replete with such things.⁹¹ This (right to left) symbol, usually formulated as a heptad in almost all Islamic amulets and talismans, in many Shaykhī and Bābī textual and talismanic iterations is often presented in an ogdoadic form whereby the pentalpha seal is repeated twice, once beginning the sequence of the symbol and then again closing it after the inverted wāw (which, in itself, elsewhere is supposed to be the final sequence of the complete symbol). Since Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ṭaqī were brothers, one can hypothesize that perhaps Ṣubḥ-i-Azal may have intended the ambiguity around this *seven-eight* number to reflect this repeat pentalphic cipher, which is a single symbol (or a unit) but occurring twice, such that the two brothers represent the right and left pentagram. In this way, at least, the *symbolic* integrity around the number seven can still be maintained. Of course, the Qur'ān as well as the *ḥadīth* literature also vaguely frame the relationship of Moses to Aaron as being the relationship of a single unit.

Muḥammad: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter *bā'*

Usually in the terminology of the early Bābīs and Bahā'īs the land of [the letter] *bā'* [ب] instances Bārfurūsh (i.e. Bābul).⁹² In some of his correspondences addressed to those Bābīs then resident in Baghdad, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal however refers to Baghdad as the “land of *bā'*.” Given that Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī has been referred to in Bahā'ī sources as “the witness of the Bayān for Baghdād and Karbalah,” it can be assumed with some confidence that he is the same individual appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as the Witness of the Bayān for Baghdad.⁹³ The Bayānīs in turn have characterized him as among “the most honored witnesses of the Bayān”⁹⁴ and even as

⁹⁰ For the symbol of the ‘Seven Seals’ or ‘Greatest Name’, see Lloyd Graham ‘A comparison of the Seven Seals in Islamic esotericism and Jewish Kabbalah’, online, https://www.academia.edu/5998229/A_comparison_of_the_Seven_Seals_in_Islamic_esotericism_and_Jewish_Kabbalah (October 9, 2017); for its Shaykhī-Bābī ogdoadic form, see MacEoin *Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism* (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1994), 23, 101, 136, 145-153; also Siyyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb *bayān-i-fārsī*, glossary and terms, 12 (PDF: 349).

⁹¹ Note also MacEoin’s apropos comment in *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 557.

⁹² Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 2, 5. In *tārīkh-i-fīrqi-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 14, Siyyid Miqdād Nabavī-Razavī identifies the land of the letter *bā'* as Bārfurūsh (Bābul) while claiming that he was unable to identify any witnesses for that town. In a 2015 (unpublished) correction to the chapter, he rectified this information wherein he also claims to be in possession of a facsimile of a letter by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal addressed to Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī in which Baghdad has explicitly been referred to as the land of the letter *bā'*.

⁹³ Shoghi Effendi *tawqī‘āt-i-mubāraka (lawḥ-i-qarn-i-aḥibā’-i-sharq)* (The Blessed Counsels: The Tablet of the Century of the Friends from the East) (n.p., 123 *badī’*/1967-8 CE), 60 and 61, online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/se/se1/se1.htm> (accessed October 2, 2015).

⁹⁴ Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 24.

“the greatest and most eminent of the...witnesses.”⁹⁵ The Bahā’īs have, for their part, described him as “the first point of refuge for the Azalīs.”⁹⁶ Be that as it may, his elevation to the leadership over the Bābīs of Baghdad while Şubḥ-i-Azal still resided there in itself is sufficient to demonstrate his prominence among them.

Now, before Bahā’u’llāh put forth his claims, like Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī (the witness of the Bayān for Kāshān) as well as Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī (the witness of the Bayān for Qazvīn), Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Işfahānī apparently harboured grave suspicions and misgivings about Bahā’u’llāh.⁹⁷ Upon the publicization of Bahā’u’llāh’s claims in 1866-7, Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Işfahānī adopted a policy of rigorous opposition to its author. There even exists an untitled treatise (a *raddīya*) written by him in refutation of the Bahā’ī founder.⁹⁸ His trenchant and robust efforts on behalf of Şubḥ-i-Azal were such that Bahā’u’llāh claimed him as the prime mover of Şubḥ-i-Azal’s “wayward aberration” (*aqhwā*).⁹⁹ In contrast, Şubḥ-i-Azal showered him with praises and extended his heartfelt gratitude, likewise bestowing upon him the title *abā waḥīd* (the father of *waḥīd*),¹⁰⁰ as it were, designating Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Işfahānī as his own paternal caretaker.¹⁰¹ This Witness of the Bayān was sent by the Ottoman authorities to exile in Acre, Palestine alongside Bahā’u’llāh and his partisans. His vehement opposition to Bahā’u’llāh continued from there and as a consequence he was murdered by a group of Bahā’īs in 1871 (1288 AH).¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Mullā ‘Alī Muḥammad Sirāj *kitāb-i-sirāj*, 55.

⁹⁶ Anonymous *tārikh-i-amr* (History of the Cause) (n.d., n.p.), 115.

⁹⁷ Asad’u’llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 181.

⁹⁸ One MS of this work exists in the Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 242, vol. 24; some of his letters and correspondences (which can be found in the Princeton collection as well) are also found in the digital archives of the Rouhi (Sarlati) collection of Harvard University’s Women’s Worlds in Qajar Iran, online, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/31795822?n=4&printThumbnails=true> (accessed October 8, 2017).

⁹⁹ Asad’u’llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 1 (n.p., 131 *badī*/1966-7 CE), 151.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Izzīyah Khānūm *tanbīḥ al-nā’imīn*, editor’s introduction to the first typescript edition, 3.

¹⁰¹ Since, as mentioned above, one of the titles bestowed by the Bāb upon Şubḥ-i-Azal was *ism allāh al-waḥīd* (the name of God, the one).

¹⁰² Asad’u’llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 5, 163. We also note that in his marginalia and commentary on *tarjumiḥ-i-tārikh-i-bābiyih*, Shaykh Maḥdī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm Kirmānī contends that the murder of Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Işfahānī took place at the hands of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ personally who was accompanied by three accomplices who helped him in the deed. He alleges that one of the wives of Şubḥ-i-Azal who had been banished by the Ottomans to Acre alongside the Bahā’īs, namely Badr Jahān Khānūm (the sister of Mīrzā Riḍā-Qulī Tafrishī, also killed by the Bahā’īs), was a personal eyewitness to the event, see Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 261, vol. 36, *folio 60a-b* (paginated at 117 and 118). However, we note here that this attribution of the murder of Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Işfahānī directly to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ is Shaykh Maḥdī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm Kirmānī’s own contention and is not one that, to our knowledge, other Bayānī sources have explicitly made. Be that as it may, E.G. Browne observes that this event was viewed with some level of complaisance by the Bahā’ī founder, where he also quotes (in the original as well as in translation) one of Bahā’u’llāh’s own epistles from the period addressed to one of his disciples where he is quoted as saying, “O phlebotomist of the Divine Unity! Throb like the artery in the body of the Contingent World, and drink of the blood of the Block of Heedlessness for that he turned aside from the aspect of thy Lord the Merciful!” see *A Travellers Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume 2, Note W, 359, 363 and 370.

Ja'far: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter *kāf*

In the terminology of the early Bābīs and Bahā'īs “the land of the [letter] *kāf* [ک]” refers to Kāshān.¹⁰³ According to the Bahā'ī sources, Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī was specifically appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as a Witness to that city.¹⁰⁴ In the colophon at the beginning of **MS (2)** of the *kitāb al-waṣīya*, it is noted by its scribe that in one of his works Narāqī openly acknowledges to having been elevated to the rank of Witness by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal and as such identifies himself as the Witness of the Bayān for the people of Kāshān (see **Fig. 4** below at the end where this is confirmed by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī).¹⁰⁵

Before the declaration of the Bāb in 1844, Narāqī mostly studied under Siyyid Kāẓim Rashtī in Iraq. On his return to Iran from Iraq, Narāqī increasingly oriented himself to the ideas of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ahsā'ī¹⁰⁶ and his school while also finding himself positioned among the ranks of the “Shaykhī *‘ulamā*.”¹⁰⁷ During the stop over of Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī in Kāshān in late 1844, Narāqī was first introduced to the Bāb's claims¹⁰⁸ and eventually during the final year of the Bāb's life (1849-50) he too converted to the Bābī cause.¹⁰⁹ Due to his Bābī activism and proselytization efforts, he faced fierce antagonism and opposition from locals and was twice expelled to Iraq. During his second period of residency in Iraq, the independent theophanic claims then being put forward by Bahā'ullāh were then only gradually becoming known.¹¹⁰ In light of these claims, Narāqī became among the most vociferous opponents of Bahā'ullāh who, prior to even the inception of such claims, was already not at all well disposed to him personally, believing Bahā'ullāh was secretly harbouring ambitions of his own.¹¹¹ After Bahā'ullāh publicly disclosed his claims in Edirne, Narāqī became an implacable enemy, attacking him in writing. He authored the treatise *tadhkirat'ul-ghāfilīn* (Remonstrance to the Heedless Ones) in refutation of Bahā'ullāh's claims which is generally considered to be among the more extensive and systematic of such works in the genre. In the end, however, after being arrested in Kāẓimayn and then returned by authorities to Iran, he died in a Tehran prison in 1869-70 (1286 AH) under somewhat suspicious circumstances, alleged to have been poisoned to death.¹¹²

¹⁰³ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māẓandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.3, 392; idem *asrār al-āthār*, vol.5, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ This is from the introductory note to the colophon of **MS (2)** by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī already mentioned above; see also, Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-firq-i-bābīyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Sharīf Kāshānī *tārikh-i-ja'fari*, digital MS, online, <http://bayanic.com/lib/scan/hist/Jafari/Jafari.pdf> (accessed October 7, 2017), 3 and 4.

¹⁰⁷ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māẓandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.3, 396.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Sharīf Kāshānī *tārikh-i-ja'fari*, 6.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 47-50.

¹¹¹ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māẓandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 168, 183-5 and 229.

¹¹² Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Sharīf Kāshānī *tārikh-i-ja'fari*, 92-4. See also, <http://www.bayanic.com/lib/typed/hist/AzalHist/Subh-bio-Eng.htm> (accessed October 10, 2017).

It should be noted that Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī accounts Narāqī as being among the twenty plus claimants who put forth independent theophanic claims of their own in the chaotic period following the execution of the Bāb, several outright claiming to be *man yuzhiruhu* ‘*Llāh*.¹¹³ However, we are not entirely convinced as to whether the “Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Kāshani” (and not ‘Narāqī’) referred to by Dahajī on (the seventh line of) page sixty-nine of his *risālih* to E.G. Browne is in fact our Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī or someone else Dahajī may have confused him with. We say this because Dahajī appears to us to be the source originating this specific claim (if he is indeed referring to Narāqī), a notable biographical detail about him that has been uncritically repeated by countless Bahā’ī historians (and as recently as 2001-2002 on the scholarly H-Bahai list¹¹⁴) yet is completely absent in all the sources before it. None of the Bayānī sources, who usually have no qualms about identifying any of those among their own ranks who have previously made such claims, detail or mention it. As such, barring any earlier, independent accounts corroborating it, this noted point in the biography of Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī (unless Dahajī has confused our Narāqī with someone else) should be dismissed.

Ibrāhīm: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter *tā’* and the ‘episode of Dayyān’

The early Bābīs and Bahā’īs denoted Tabrīz as “the land of [the letter] *tā’* [ت].”¹¹⁵ In the section of the *kitāb al-waṣīya* addressed to Ibrāhīm, as noted in the translation above, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal also addresses him as *khalīl* (friend). Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī was one of the prominent Bābīs of Tabrīz during the lifetime of the Bāb. According to the Bahā’ī sources, he was numbered among the “most celebrated of the Shaykhī ‘*ulamā* and senior companions of Siyyid [Kāẓim] Rashtī.”¹¹⁶ At the very outset of the Bāb’s declaration he became one of his followers, and during the period when the Bāb was held in captivity in Azerbaijan, he met with him in person. He was given two titles by the Bāb, namely, *ism allāh al-khalīl* (the name of God, the friend) and *ism allāh al-raḥīm* (the name of God, the merciful).¹¹⁷ In the subsequent years following the execution of the Bāb, he continued to live in Tabrīz. Given that Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī (the holder of the titles *ism allāh al-khalīl* and *ism allāh al-raḥīm*) was an eminent Bābī, and Ibrāhīm (the witness of the Bayān for Tabrīz) was also addressed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal with the title

¹¹³ See *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 377-8, for a list naming twenty of these individuals.

¹¹⁴ See especially the 2002 H-Bahai discussion thread “Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure,” online, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Bahai&month=0204&week=c&msg=9tfp8efPhhH7kYH5DezTew&user=H-Bahai&pw=listpass> (accessed November 2, 2017).

¹¹⁵ Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 2 (n.p., 124 badi‘/1967-8 CE), 133.

¹¹⁶ Asad’ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 38; Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-firq-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 10-11.

¹¹⁷ See *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 344-5.

khalīl, it is fairly apparent that he is one and the same person addressed by Şubḥ-i-Azal in the *kitāb al-waṣīya* as the Witness of the Bayān for Tabrīz.

Be that as it may, during the period when Mīrzā Asad u'llāh Khu'ī Dayyān (d. 1856) put forth his claims to being the Bābī messiah *man yuḏhiruhu'llāh*, Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī became his leading follower. In the Book of the Sleeper Awakened (*kitāb-i-mustayqiz*), which was specifically composed in refutation of Dayyān's claims, Şubḥ-i-Azal denounces Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī as "...*khalīl* who abjured [God] and disbelieved in his signs/verses..."¹¹⁸ This may be due to the fact that the prime mover for the dissemination of Dayyān's claims in Azerbaijan, and especially the attraction of a group of Bābīs to Dayyān's side (known to posterity as the *Asadīyyūn*), was due to the efforts of Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī himself.¹¹⁹ As such, even though Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī had at one time been among the eminent followers of the Bāb, and had even obtained two titles from him (as well as later finding himself appointed to the rank of a Witness by Şubḥ-i-Azal), he later defected from the ranks of the Bābīs and instead joined Dayyān. The Bahā'ī accounts maintain that Mīrzā Asadu'llāh Khu'ī Dayyān and Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī together went to Baghdad and "repented of their actions" before Bahā'u'llāh.¹²⁰ A few of the Bayānīs accounts instead contend that Dayyān intended to repent, albeit the event never actually took place, but instead it was meant to have occurred in the presence of Şubḥ-i-Azal.¹²¹ In any case, in the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī has been frequently excoriated and denounced by Şubḥ-i-Azal with the epithet *abū dawāhī* (the father of calamities) to Mīrzā Asadu'llāh Khu'ī Dayyān's *abū shurūr* (the father of evils).¹²² There are no further details about him after the 'episode of Dayyān', and presumably he dropped out of all further public activity after this fiasco. Māzandarānī states that he lived the remainder of his life in Tabriz and up to a ripe old age but without specifying a date of death.¹²³

Now, before going on to identify the next witness, the controversy surrounding Dayyān's death should also now be addressed.¹²⁴ In their literature the Bahā'īs have framed the condemnatory passages of the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* by Şubḥ-i-Azal against Tabrīzī and Dayyān as singularly constituting an unequivocal *fatwā* of death issued by the former against the latter two, providing evidence to that effect via the oft quoted passage (phrased as a command), which states, "...and you are [all] quietly mute

¹¹⁸ Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī Şubḥ-i-Azal *kitāb-i-mustayqiz*, 382 (digital pagination at 387).).

¹¹⁹ The diffusion of Dayyān's claims in Āzarbāijān and Gīlān is mentioned by Māzandarānī in *ṭārikh-i-ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 66.

¹²⁰ Asad'u'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 164-5 and notes.

¹²¹ 'Izzīyah Khānūm *tanbīh al-nā'imīn*, 43.

¹²² It should be noted that in his early 1844 commentary on the *sūrah al-baqara* (2), the Bāb uses both of these pejorative titles as epithets for Abū Bakr (d. 634) and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) respectively, see Todd Lawson "Religious Authority & Apocalypse in an Early Work by the Bāb," in (ed.) Orkhan Mir-Kasimov *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2014), 38-75, esp. 46 and 60.

¹²³ Asad'u'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 39.

¹²⁴ In Western print, MacEoin's *The Messiah of Shiraz* so far offers the most balanced, concise biography of Dayyān, esp. 389.

[reclining] on your seats yet do not impale [or ‘transfix’] that accursed one with your spears....” (...*wa antum šāmitūn fī maqā'idikum wa lā tarmūna hadha al-mal'ūn bi-rimāḥikum...*).¹²⁵ In his *kitāb-i-badī* Bahā'ullāh has explicitly formulated such statements by Šubḥ-i-Azal as being in the nature of a *fatwā* of death issued against both Tabrīzī and Dayyān (...*dar kitāb-i-sijjīn-i-khud kih bi-mustayqiz ma'rūf ast fatvāyih ān mazlūm rā dādih va hamchinīn nufūs-i-digar...*).¹²⁶ But according to letters and correspondences of Bahā'ullāh quoted by 'Izzīyah Khānūm in *tanbīh al-nā'mīn*, at the time Bahā'ullāh himself viewed Dayyān in a contemptuous light and likewise excoriated him with the same epithet as the one Šubḥ-i-Azal polemicizes Dayyān with, namely, *abū shurūr*; this, while even hinting at having personally masterminded Dayyān's demise (viz. ...*bi-faḍl'ullāh hamih-rā muḍmaḥil nimūdam va amr'ullāh rā bi-itmām risāndam...* “by the grace of God, I obliterated every one [of those claimants] and brought the command of God to completion...”).¹²⁷ For its part, *hasht bihisht* unambiguously maintains that the murder of Dayyān (to which event Tabrīzī himself may have been eyewitness) was undertaken on the orders of Bahā'ullāh personally with the act itself carried out by his servant named Mīrzā Muḥammad Māzandarānī.¹²⁸ In his *The Religion of the Bayān and the Claims of the Bahā'īs*, Jalāl Azal (d. 1971) surmises that there was “no decree for murder” in the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* and simultaneously reprimands E.G. Browne for his “faulty” translation of the passage quoted from it here in the latter's *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (page 218) while adducing evidence from a later part of the book (page 44) wherein Šubḥ-i-Azal vaguely exhorts his followers to silence Dayyān and his claims by their words rather than by physical means.¹²⁹

Yet earlier Bayānī sources themselves, such as Naraqī, also quote a statement attributed to Šubḥ-i-Azal, which is not in the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz*, wherein one year before Dayyān's death Šubḥ-i-Azal had in writing foretold that Dayyān would be killed at the

¹²⁵ *Kitāb-i-mustayqiz*, 15.

¹²⁶ *Kitāb-i-badī*, 102, see also 89.

¹²⁷ *Tanbīh al-nā'mīn*, 87.

¹²⁸ *Hasht bihisht*, 302-03/214 (PDF: 233). The Bahā'ī sources, such as Adib Taherzāh's *The Revelation of Bāhā'u'llah, Volume 1: Baghdad 1853-63* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), 251-2, claim instead that Mīrzā Muḥammad Māzandarānī was acting on Šubḥ-i-Azal's orders and had been sent to Azerbaijan for that specific purpose. However, while there seems to be some disagreement about the dating of this event (some holding it to be in 1856, others in 1857 and yet 1858), most of the sources are in agreement that Dayyān's death occurred in Baghdad when he came there from Azerbaijan in order to challenge Šubḥ-i-Azal directly face to face (Bahā'ī sources maintain he was specifically lured from Azerbaijan to Baghdad by Mīrzā Muḥammad Māzandarānī personally) and after Bahā'ullāh's return to Baghdad had already occurred following the latter's two year 'self-imposed' exile in the mountains of Sulīmaniyyah, Kurdistan. A few sources maintain that Dayyān was drowned in the Tigris river at the hands of this Mīrzā Muḥammad Māzandarānī following a discussion with Bahā'ullāh, *hasht bihisht*, *ibid*. Be that as it may, the reasoning offered in Bahā'ī sources as to why Dayyān deigned to come from Azerbaijan to Baghdad in the first place make little sense whereas a few of the Bayānī ones that contend Dayyān may have come specifically to challenge Šubḥ-i-Azal to a public *mubāhala* (a mutual execration contest rooted in the events recounted in Qur'ān 3:61) or something similar to it sound more credible.

¹²⁹ (Cyprus: 1967-7; digital Bayanic.com publication, 2004), 176, online, <https://archive.org/details/TheReligionOfTheBayanAndTheClaimsOfTheBahais> (accessed December 22, 2017), 175.

hands of someone named ‘Muḥammad’.¹³⁰ This same statement is quoted by Sirāj as well, adding that this forecast was one of the demonstrated “miracles” of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (presumably of ‘inspired precognition’) rather than being cynical or premeditated, in the process exonerating Ṣubḥ-i-Azal from any responsibility in masterminding Dayyān’s death.¹³¹ Years later when asked about it, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal himself personally confirmed to Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Kātib that he had indeed made this statement cited by Naraqī and Sirāj due to the fact that at the time Dayyān had penned a number of epistles, which he had circulated far and wide, wherein he had publicly “cursed” and “abjured” the Bāb.¹³² In *tanbīh al-nā’min* ‘Izzīyah Khānūm confirms Dayyān’s “apostasy” and his complete abjuration of the Bābī founder also adding that out of spite Dayyān had wilfully destroyed by fire many of the Bāb’s writings.¹³³ The particularly egregious (or rather *sacrilegiously* deemed) nature of this later act in the eyes of the Bayānīs of the time is probably attributable to the fact that the Bāb had earlier nominated Dayyān as the chief caretaker and custodian to his writings¹³⁴ (many of which were being actively searched and destroyed by the Qājār state and ‘ulamā at the time, making the corpus of the Bāb’s writings scarce even to its own adherents) as well as appointing him as a scribe to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal.¹³⁵ So if the claims of *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* regarding Dayyān and his Asadiyyūn are to be taken at face value (and especially some of the direct quotations made by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal from Dayyān’s own words), it appears that Dayyān had not only attempted to set himself up as a rival to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal for the supreme authority of Bābism but, above all, as a contender to Bābism itself together with its founder, let alone the founder’s putative successor; this, whereby the destruction of the Bāb’s

¹³⁰ *Tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 95.

¹³¹ *Kitāb-i-sirāj*, 5-6.

¹³² In *nivishtih’i yakī az mu’minīn-i-bayān dar javāb-i-maktūb-i-jināb-i-mullā zayn al-‘ābidīn-i-najafābādī* (The writing of one of the believers of the Bayān in response to the correspondence of his eminence Mullā Zayn’ul-‘Abidīn Najafābādī), Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 239, Vol. 21, (folio 58a-b) 115-6 (original pagination), see also online transcribed version, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol5/zayn/zaynresp.htm> (accessed March 15, 2018)

¹³³ *Tanbīh al-nā’min*, 89. Note also, as glossed above, how in the Persian Bayān (3:2) the Bāb specified his writings as constituting the *ḥujjat-i-bāqīya* (the remaining proof) of his religion that was to endure until the following theophany and how (a theme implicitly echoed in the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* throughout) such an singular act as the destruction of these writings by fire would have been viewed as both an unmitigated act of betrayal as well as a consequentially far-reaching, ‘blasphemous’ challenge to the entire legitimacy of the creed itself and its survival. This would lead one to believe that in the minds of the Bābī leadership of the time none of the Bayān’s injunctions cautioning against and forbidding any form of violence against ‘claimants’ to the supreme rank would any longer apply in Dayyān’s case, since, arguably, with such an action as destroying the works of the Bāb Dayyān had effectively declared war on the Bayān itself. Beyond his theophanic claim and its wide ranging provocation to the Bābī leadership of the period, one can only speculate as to what specifically led Dayyān at that stage to exhibit such marked animosity towards the Bāb himself and his writings. However, most of the sources other than *tanbīh al-nā’min* have generally downplayed, or otherwise remained silent -- and even argumentatively *gaslighted* retrospectively, as many Bahā’ī sources often do -- on this particularly sensitive point with regard to the overall ‘episode of Dayyān’ and how it may have been viewed during the period of its unfolding.

¹³⁴ A point which even the Bahā’ī sources themselves generally confirm, see Adib Taherzadeh’s *The Revelation of Bāhā’u’llah, Volume 1: Baghdād 1853-63*, 249-51.

¹³⁵ William M. Miller *The Baha’i Faith: Its History and Teachings*, 85.

corpus of writings in his care may have meant to Dayyān himself the very destruction of the Bābī movement.¹³⁶ The overall tone around the ‘episode of Dayyān’ in the Bayānī sources, and in ‘Izzīyah Khānūm particularly, frames the event via this general lens. So even with the second line he instances from *kitāb-i-mustayqiz* qualifying the earlier statement, Jalāl Azal appears to be the lone dissenting voice among the specifically Bayānī sources in the manner in which he glosses the event.

Muḥammad: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter ṭāʾ

In the terminology of the early Bābīs and Bahāʾīs “the land of [the letter] ṭāʾ [ط] indicates Tehran.¹³⁷ In one of his writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahāʾ refers to Siyyid Muḥammad Malīḥ as being among the witnesses of the Bayān for Tehran.¹³⁸ The original name of this individual was Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpāyḡānī, who from the very outset of the Bābī movement was among the foremost companions of Qurraṭʾul-ʿAyn (d. 1852). He obtained from her the title *fatā al-maliḥ* (‘the youth of comely face’ or ‘pleasant countenance’).¹³⁹ After her expulsion from the Shiʿi shrine centers in 1847 by the Ottoman authorities, he accompanied Qurraṭʾul-ʿAyn from Iraq to Qazvin,¹⁴⁰ and some five-six years later found himself appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as one of the witnesses of the Bayān.¹⁴¹ Information regarding his ultimate fate, especially his date of death, currently remain unknown.

Mūsā: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of the letter qāf

¹³⁶ While most sources assert that Dayyān had staked an unequivocal claim to the station of *man yuḡhiruhuʾllāh*, in the *kitāb-i-mustayqiz*, 8, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal maintains that Dayyān had specifically claimed to be the *qāʾim* (the One Who Arises) which is precisely the station the Bāb himself had claimed in 1847. However, it can be argued that in Bābī technical terminology *qāʾim* does in fact refer to any epochal locus of divine theophany (whether this be the Bāb himself or the Bābī *mawʿūd*, or even previous ‘manifestations’ such as Muḥammad, Jesus, Moses and Abraham) such that Dayyān was indeed claiming the station of *man yuḡhiruhuʾllāh* by direct inference. As an aside, it should be mentioned that earlier during the 1848-9 period of the Shaykh Ṭabarsī Bābī uprising in Māzandarān, Mullā Muḥammad ʿAlī Bārfurūshī (d. 1849) entitled *Quddūs* (the Holy) -- the eighteenth and final individual among the original Bābī Letters of the Living, accounted in some sources as the Bāb’s “spiritual equal” and even on one notable occasion as his ‘superior’ -- had likewise claimed to be the *qāʾim* (or, alternatively, had had the ‘title’ and ‘station’ conferred -- or rather devolve -- upon him by the Bāb during the course of the conflict as the Bāb himself progressively elevated his own claims to the rank of ‘divinity’), see (ed.) E.G. Browne *Kitāb Nuḡṭatʾul-Kāf: Being the Earliest History of the Bābīs*, 152-3 and 202. For Bārfurūshī, see also MacEoin’s *Elr* entry, online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barforusi-molla-mohammad-ali> (accessed March 17, 2018).

¹³⁷ Asadʾullāh Fāḡil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḡaqq*, vol. 3, 205; idem *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 4 (n.p., 129 *badiʿ*/ 1972-3), 271.

¹³⁸ ʿAbdʾul-Ḥamid Ishrāq-Khāvarī *māʾdih-i-āsmānī*, vol. 5, (n.p., 129 *badiʿ*/1972-3 CE), 290; Siyyid Miḡdad Nabavi-Razavi *tārikh-i-firḡ-i-bābīyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 12.

¹³⁹ ʿAbdʾul-Ḥamid Ishrāq-Khāvarī *dāʾiratʾul-maʿārif-i-bahāʾī* (Bahāʾī Encyclopedia) (n.d., n.p.), entry: Siyyid Muḥammad Malīḥ, online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol5/dairih/dairih.htm> (accessed October 1, 2017).

¹⁴⁰ Asadʾullāh Fāḡil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḡaqq*, vol. 3, 322.

¹⁴¹ ʿAbdʾul-Ḥamid Ishrāq-Khāvarī *dāʾiratʾul-maʿārif-i-bahāʾī*, ibid.

Qum as well as Qazvīn refers to the land of [the letter] *qāf* [ق] in the terminology of the early Bābīs and Bahā'īs.¹⁴² When discussing the witnesses of the Bayān, Bahā'ullāh instances Ḥājji Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī as being among them.¹⁴³ Based on this information, we can determine that this individual is the same person who was the Witness of the Bayān for the Bābīs of Qum. A maternal grandson of Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim Muḥtahid Qummī (one of the renowned clerics during the era of Fath'alishāh Qājār), Ḥājji Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī joined the rank of the followers of the Bāb via the efforts of both Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'i as well as Mullā 'Abd'ul-Karīm Qazvīnī and established himself among the ranks of the “Bābī ‘ulamā.”¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note here that after the execution of the Bāb in 1850, and prior to the claims of Bahā'ullāh, Ḥājji Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī was himself a claimant to the rank of *man yuḏhiruhu'llāh*. According to the accounts provided by the Bahā'īs, eventually in the year 1857 (1274 AH) he fled to Baghdad and after coming face to face with Bahā'ullāh, who at the time was Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's chief deputy, repented of his claim.¹⁴⁵ The account of the Bayānīs holds that he repented to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal.¹⁴⁶ Late Bahā'ī historian, BBC (Persian section) presenter and “Hand of the Cause of God” H.M. Balyūzī (d. 1980) asserts that Ḥājji Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī eventually sided with Bahā'ullāh.¹⁴⁷ However, this last information cannot be independently corroborated anywhere else. We currently do not possess a date of death for him either.

Hādī: the Witness of the Bayān for the people in the land of *qāf*

As mentioned above, in their terminology the early Bābīs and Bahā'īs referred to Qum and Qazvīn as the land of [the letter] *qāf* [ق]. Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī mentions the name of Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī among this group of witnesses,¹⁴⁸ and elsewhere he has explicitly identified him as being among these witnesses of the Bayān.¹⁴⁹ Fāḍil Māzandarānī has also identified him as being among the witnesses of the Bayān as well as one of the original “Letters of the Living” and an “Azalī leader,” and likewise also as one of the opponents of Bahā'u'llāh and his claims.¹⁵⁰

Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī was the son of Mullā 'Abd'ul-Wahhāb Qazvīnī (the maternal uncle of Qurrat'ul-'Ayn). At the outset, like his father, he was accounted

¹⁴² Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 4, 462.

¹⁴³ Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā'ullāh *kītāb-i-badī*, 295; Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārīkh-i-firqī-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārīkh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 391 and 392.

¹⁴⁵ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārīkh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 181 and 182.

¹⁴⁶ Siyyid Mahdī Sarlatī *vaṣīyat nāmih* (will and testament), private MS, 95.

¹⁴⁷ In *Bahā'u'llāh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald Publishers, 1979), 122 and 131.

¹⁴⁸ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 38.

¹⁴⁹ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *risālih-i-raddiyya*, 49.

¹⁵⁰ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 5, 251; Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi *tārīkh-i-firqī-i-bābiyih dar baghdād az 1268 tā 1280*, chapter 4, 13-14.

among the supporters of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī.¹⁵¹ According to the Bahāʾī sources, at the very initial stages of the declaration of the Bāb, Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī went to Shīrāz and became among the first eighteen individuals to accept the Bāb's claims (viz. the Letters of the Living, *ḥurūf al-ḥayy*). Soon afterward he went to Karbalā and there proselytized the Bābī *daʿwa*. After this initial period, he returned to Qazvīn and there succeeded in meeting the Bāb for one last time on the outskirts of the city in 1847. He was also one of the senior Bābīs of the early generation who, well before the claims put forth by Bahāʾuʾllāh, was ill disposed to him, believing him to be a claimant harbouring lofty ambitions.¹⁵² Apparently he lived to an old age but no further information is available about him at this time, especially his date of death.

The appointment of additional witnesses of the Bayān in Baghdad

Besides those *seven-eight* individuals initially appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as witnesses of the Bayān mentioned above, other names also appear in the sources who were likewise appointed to the rank during the succeeding years of his residency in Baghdad. According to the Bahāʾī accounts, during Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's years in Baghdad, Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī was the witness of the Bayān for Karbalah.¹⁵³ But with consideration to what had occurred prior to this, it should be emphasized that it was only after he had already been appointed as the Witness for Baghdad that he was simultaneously appointed to the leadership over the Bābīs of Karbalah as well. This last appointment must have taken place around the year 1855-6 (1272 AH),¹⁵⁴ that is, approximately four years after his appointment to the rank of Witness for Baghdad.

The account related by Māzandarānī holds that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal had also appointed Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr and Mullā ʿAlī Muḥammad Sirāj as witnesses of the Bayān. In light of this account, it may be inferred that their appointment could have occurred around the same year, i.e. 1855-6 (1272 AH).¹⁵⁵ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī likewise mentions Qahīr's name amongst that group who mostly consisted of witnesses.¹⁵⁶ After the claims of Bahāʾuʾllāh were publicized, Qahīr and Sirāj both energetically opposed them and each independently composed a treatise in refutation of him. The accounts of the Bayānīs alleges that in 1867-8 (1284 AH) first Sirāj and then later Qahīr

¹⁵¹ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 312.

¹⁵² Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 5, 312.

¹⁵³ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih*, 76.

¹⁵⁴ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 154. Māzandarānī recounts the following regarding the events during the year 1855-6 (1272 AH): "In the interval of those days, Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī and also Mullā Rajab ʿAlī and Mullā ʿAlī Muḥammad (the brothers of the Primal Point's temporary wife [in Isfahan]) came with their sister to Iraq and settled in Karbala...[Ṣubḥ-i-Azal], Siyyid Muḥammad, the brothers of the temporary wife, Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī, others among the witnesses of the Bayān, together with the whole procession of their retinue, settled there" (ibid.) By this calculation, the appointment of Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, Qahīr and Sirāj must be pin-pointed to approximately 1855-6 (1272 AH).

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* This conclusion is reached based on the information gleaned in the quote above by Māzandarānī concerning the year 1855-6 (1272 AH).

¹⁵⁶ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 38.

in 1869-70 (1286 AH) were both murdered by the Bahā'īs for their public efforts against the Bahā'ī founder.¹⁵⁷

The Bahā'īs likewise hold Mullā Muḥammad Ṭaqī Narāqī (the brother of Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī) to have been the witness of the Bayān for the Bābīs of Narāq. Their accounts suggest that during the same period of his brother's residency in Kāshān, Mullā Muḥammad Ṭaqī Narāqī was acting as the Witness of the Bayān for their home town of Narāq.¹⁵⁸ Considering the fact that the narrator Dahajī's¹⁵⁹ meeting with these two brothers coincided with his own visit to Baghdad; and given that this visit occurred in 1857-8 (1274 AH);¹⁶⁰ the conclusion can be drawn that between the years 1852 (1268 AH) and 1857-8 (1274 AH) Mullā Muḥammad Ṭaqī Narāqī had been appointed as the Witness of the Bayān for the Bābīs there. A conclusive date of death for him has so far not been located.

The name of Ḥājji Siyyid Jawād Ṭabāṭabā'ī Karbalā'ī (d. 1882) has also been noted as among the witnesses of the Bayān during the period of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's residency in Baghdad.¹⁶¹ A descendent of the celebrated scholar and mystic Āqā Siyyid Mahdī Bahr al-'Ulūm (d. 1797), in his youth Ḥājji Siyyid Jawād Karbalā'ī had met Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ahsā'ī, later embarking on a course of study under the tutelage of Siyyid Kāẓim Rashtī, in due course becoming well reputed among the Shaykhī 'ulamā. Likewise, due to his friendship with the maternal uncles of the Bāb, he would regularly encounter the Bāb during the Bāb's childhood and adolescence years in Shīrāz and Bushihr. Eventually in the first year of the Bāb's declaration in 1844, Ḥājji Siyyid Jawād Karbalā'ī himself became a Bābī, quickly positioning himself now among their prominent ranks.¹⁶² However, even though he was an early Bābī, he was not among the ranks of the Letters of the Living.

The witnesses of the Bayān in the period of Bahā'ullāh's declaration and schism

While Bahā'ī sources vehemently disagree, the Bayānī sources instead all allege that during the Baghdad years Bahā'ullāh carefully schemed from behind the scenes against Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, thus laying down the foundations for his later claim to being *man yuzḥiruhu'llāh*, a claim, which as we mentioned, was initially made to a select group of Bābīs just when Bahā'ullāh, his family and a handful of followers were about to depart Baghdad for Ottoman Turkey in April-May of 1863 (*dhu'l-qa'da* 1279 AH).¹⁶³ Eventually he made his claims overt in 1866-7 (particularly during the later part of 1283 AH, i.e.

¹⁵⁷ 'Izzīyah Khānūm *tanbīh al-nā'imīn*, editors introduction, 2-3.

¹⁵⁸ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih*, 61.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 61 and 62.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 1 and 2.

¹⁶¹ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 24.

¹⁶² Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzāndarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 238-41.

¹⁶³ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzāndarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 264-8; Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 140 and 141.

1867).¹⁶⁴ With the evidence of the *kitāb-i-badī*,¹⁶⁵ which was composed by Bahā'u'llāh in 1867 in response to the written attacks by the followers of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, we can surmise that three important individuals among the witnesses of the Bayān were still holding the rank at that stage.¹⁶⁶ At that time, Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī (witness of the Bayān for Baghdad and Karbalah),¹⁶⁷ Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī (the witness of the Bayān for Qazvīn) (still alive in 1286 AH/1869-70 CE)¹⁶⁸ and Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī (the witness of the Bayān for Kashan)¹⁶⁹ were all actively opposing the claims of Bahā'ullāh.

As noted, Hājji Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī (the witness of the Bayān for Qum) for a time himself entertained the claim of being *man yuḏhiruhu'llāh* while Siyyid Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī (the witness of the Bayān in Tabrīz), for his part, became the most prominent supporter of Mīrzā Asad'u'llāh Khu'ī Dayyān. Given this, it can be presumed that due to their actions these two became the focus of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's ire and as a result both were duly discharged from their position as witnesses. The Bayānīs have also noted the opposition of Mīrzā Aḥmad Azghandī (the witness of the Bayān for Khurasan) to Bahā'ullāh.¹⁷⁰ However, the Bahā'īs have instead claimed him as a convert and among "those supportive who diffused Bahā'u'llāh's claims."¹⁷¹ This last information, unfortunately, cannot be independently verified outside of the Bahā'ī sources. Be that as it may, and as we have already mentioned above, among this group of original witnesses, the ultimate fate of Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpāyghānī (the witness of the Bayān for Tehrān) remains unknown.

The position of Bahā'ullāh in the organizational hierarchy of the Bābīs before his declaration and schism

The Bayānī accounts all assert that during the Baghdad period Ṣubḥ-i-Azal maintained his strict policy of seclusion and concealment, and as such none of the Bābīs had any direct access to him. In this period, and based on the Bāb's advice in his own communication with Bahā'ullāh quoted above, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal duly appointed Bahā'ullāh to act as his chief personal intermediary with the other Bābīs. In this arrangement, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal would receive and then answer the correspondences of the other Bābīs

¹⁶⁴ Siyyid Mahdī Dahajī *risālih*, 36.

¹⁶⁵ Māzandarānī has located the date for the composition of this book during the middle of the events of 1866-7 (1283 AH), see Asad'u'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 5, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā'ullāh *kitāb-i-badī*, 295-6.

¹⁶⁷ Asad'u'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 5, 163.

¹⁶⁸ Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Sharīf Kāshānī *ṭārikh-i-ja'farī*, 97; the author here speaks about his meeting with Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī a short time after the death of his father, Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī, which occurred in 1869-70 (1286).

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 92 and 94.

¹⁷⁰ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 38.

¹⁷¹ Asad'u'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 6, 23.

through his older step-brother as the main go-between and middle-man.¹⁷² One of the individuals who acted as the courier for the Bābīs (an individual working directly as a personal agent of Bahā'ullāh) -- delivering their correspondences to Bahā'ullāh (who then conveyed them back to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal) -- was an individual named Salmān Hindījānī. Beginning in 1852-3 (1269 AH), and starting from southern Iran; and for approximately every year afterwards until his own death; he would travel to Yazd, Kirman, Isfahan, Kashan and elsewhere, delivering copies of the writings of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal to the Bābīs while collecting their correspondences in order to convey them back to Baghdad.¹⁷³ At this time the Bahā'ī accounts all illustrate how the family and kin of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, and particularly Bahā'ullāh himself, had become the focus of intense deference and adoration to the generality of the Bābīs.¹⁷⁴ As a consequence of this, and especially due to the networks of individuals loyal to him, Bahā'ullāh emerged as the most preeminent Bābī of the era, with the effective leadership of the Bābīs of Baghdad (and beyond) in his hands. In the accounts provided by the Bayānīs, there is much discussion regarding Bahā'ullāh's conflicts with Hājji Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī throughout this Baghdad period.¹⁷⁵ The Bayānīs also emphasize the range and extent of Bahā'ullāh's powers, and especially his wide reach, in Baghdad.¹⁷⁶ The Bahā'īs have likewise portrayed him as being the primary agent for the fame and celebrity then accruing upon the religion of the Bāb during that period.¹⁷⁷ Yet based on all of these same Bayānī accounts, Bahā'ullāh held no rank or formal position among the witnesses other than as Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's main intermediary, personal deputy and chief protector.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion: The witnesses of the Bayān during the period of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's residency in Cyprus and beyond

In light of the accounts provided by the Bahā'īs, we now know that during Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's years of residency in Cyprus (1869/70 – 1912) he continued to appoint witnesses of the Bayān.¹⁷⁹ In these years many of the earlier witnesses of the Bayān from the

¹⁷² Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Kātib *javāb-i-lawḥ-i-jināb-i-abbās effendi* (Response to the tablet of his eminence 'Abbās Effendi), Princeton University, William M. Miller Bābī MSS Collection, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, No. 226, vol. 12, (folio 22a-b) 42 and 41 (original pagination).

¹⁷³ After Bahā'ullāh made his claims Salmān became a Bahā'ī. He continued to act as a courier beyond the period of Bahā'ullāh's death in 1892 CE and into the early ministry of 'Abd'ul-Bahā' until his own death in 1898-9 (1316 AH), see Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 6, 889-91.

¹⁷⁴ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Mīrzā Muṣṭafā Kātib *nivishtih'ī yaki az mu'minīn-i-bayān dar javāb-i-maktūb-i-jināb-i-mullā zayn al-'ābidīn-i-najafābādī*, (folio 108b) 216 (original pagination).

¹⁷⁶ Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Sharīf Kāshānī *tārikh-i-jā'farī*, 49.

¹⁷⁷ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *tārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 4, 180-1.

¹⁷⁸ Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī *tadhkirāt al-ghāfilīn*, 121.

¹⁷⁹ 'Abd'ul-Ḥamid Ishrāq-Khāvarī *dā'irat'ul-ma'ārif-i-bahā'ī*, under the sub-section "...three persons among those souls who have remained..." Note that in 1869-70 (1286 AH), on the orders of Ottoman Sulṭān 'Abdu'l-'Azīz, Ṣubḥ-i-

Baghdad period had already died off. In the following era individuals such as Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Kirmānī in Kirman (d. 1893-4), Ḥājji Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī in Isfahan (d. 1908) (and later Tehran) and also Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Mujtahid Ṭārī in Ṭār (a village close to Natanz) (d. 1907, per Nabavi-Razavi 2009) became the foci of the leadership of the Bayānīs in those respective locales. As for the first name: Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Kirmānī (the father of Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī [executed in 1896]) became a follower of the Bāb in 1844.¹⁸⁰ Later due to his opposition to Bahāʾu'llāh and his steadfast support of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, he was polemicized by Bahāʾu'llāh as “Jaʿfar, the liar” (*jaʿfar-i-kadhdhāb*¹⁸¹) and lauded by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as “the augustly learned and Jaʿfar the great” (*ʿālim-i-jalīl va jaʿfar-i-kabīr*¹⁸²). For their part, Bahāʾī historians have identified him as being among the witnesses of the Bayān.¹⁸³

Ḥājji Mīrzā Siyyid Hādī Dawlatābādī (d. 1908) is probably one of the more important names among this group of post-Baghdad era witnesses. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal bestowed on him the title “the name of God, the devoted” (*ism allāh al-wadūd*).¹⁸⁴ The Bahāʾīs have identified him as being Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s chief representative for Iran¹⁸⁵ and “the most distinguished personage among the Azalīs.”¹⁸⁶ According to the Bahāʾīs, he was a witness of the Bayān¹⁸⁷ with him, his family and kin being the “...lamp (*chirāgh*) of the Bābīs in Isfahan...”¹⁸⁸ Ḥājji Mīrzā Siyyid Hādī Dawlatābādī authored the anti-Bahāʾī *raddīya* entitled *faṣl al-kalām* (the Distinguishing Words) whose original exemplar he sent directly to Bahāʾu'llāh.¹⁸⁹ Third, the Bayānīs likewise point to Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Mujtahid Ṭārī as being “among their learned (*az fuḍalā-i-khud*).”¹⁹⁰ Originally a Shaykhī ʿālim (according to Bāmdād) and by occupation a mosque preacher and religious judge, “...his threefold-administration (*maʿmūriyat-i-sih-gānīh*) as the resident Bābī in the environs of Kishih, Ṭaraq and Ṭār...” (towns in the close

Azal was exiled to Cyprus and lived there for approximately forty-five years until his death on 29 April 1912 (1330 AH); also in Asadʿullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 4, 467, and vol. 5, 309 and 310.

¹⁸⁰ Asadʿullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, 401 and 402.

¹⁸¹ Asadʿullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *asrār al-āthār*, vol. 5, *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸² ʿIzzīyah Khānūm, *ibid.*, 114.

¹⁸³ Mīzā Abuʾl-Faḍl Gulpāygānī and Siyyid Maḥdī Gulpāygānī *kashf al-ghīṭāʾ ʿan ḥīl al-aʿdāʾ* (Disclosing the Covering from the Tricks of the Enemies) (Tashkent, n.d.), online, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/index/diglib/abulfadl.htm> (accessed October 14, 2017), 358.

¹⁸⁴ Asadʿullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8 (n.p., 131 *badīʿ*/1974), first section, 506. He was simultaneously bestowed with the title *awwāh* (forbearance), cited in Qamar Tāj Dawlatābādī *asāmī-i-afrād-i-saʿādatmandī kih dar zamān-i-ḥaḍrat-i-thamara bi-qibris bi-zīyarat-i-vujūd-i-mubārakishān nāʾil shudih-and* (The names of those fortunate individuals who during the period [of the life] of his holiness the fruit were blessed with the visitation of his blessed being in Cyprus) (n.p, n.d.), 1.

¹⁸⁵ Aḥmad Kasravī *ṭārikh-i-mashrūtiḥ-i-irān* (Tehrān: 1357 solar/1977 CE), part two, 291.

¹⁸⁶ Maḥdī Bāmdād *sharḥ-i-ḥāl-i-rījāl-i-irān*, vol. 6 (Tehran: 1363 solar/1983 CE), 289.

¹⁸⁷ Mīzā Abuʾl-Faḍl Gulpāygānī and Siyyid Maḥdī Gulpāygānī *kashf al-ghīṭāʾ ʿan ḥīl al-aʿdāʾ*, 358.

¹⁸⁸ Asadʿullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8, first section, 170.

¹⁸⁹ Muḥammad Qazvinī, (ed.) Iraj Afshār, *yādāsh-t-hā-i-qazvinī*, volume 8 and 9 in one, third printing (Tehran: intishārāt-i-ʿilmī, 1363 solar), 259; *faṣl al-kalām* can be found online, <http://bayanica.com/showPict.php?id=fasl&ref=0&err=0&curr=0> (accessed October 24, 2017).

¹⁹⁰ Maḥdī Bāmdād *sharḥ-i-ḥāl-i-rījāl-i-irān*, vol. 6, 263n3.

vicinity of Naṭanz in central Iran) is how Māzandarānī has depicted Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Muḥtahid Ṭārī in the eighth volume of *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*.¹⁹¹

Perhaps most importantly of all among the post-Baghdad witnesses is the famous constitutionalist and modernist educator Ḥājji Mīrzā Siyyid Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī¹⁹² (the son of Hādī Dawlatābādī). While in the four volumes of his memoirs, *ḥayāt-i-yahyā*,¹⁹³ he himself scrupulously avoids mentioning anything remotely related to his true beliefs and Bābī affiliations (and that of his family as well); Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī should probably be recognized as the final Witness of the Bayān appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's son Riḍvān-ʿAlī (d. 1917), when recounting the circumstances surrounding his father's death, points out the Bāb's aforementioned instructions to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal regarding the necessity of the authority of the witnesses of the Bayān in the time of the absence of the mirrors; and writes, that for this reason, a short time before his death, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal nominated the son of Ḥājji Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī (i.e. as a Witness of the Bayān) and entrusted the cause of the Bāb over to him:

...Now this Holy Person [i.e. Ṣubḥ-i-Azal] before his death had nominated [as his executor or successor] the son of Āqā Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī of Dawlatābād, who was one of the leading believers and relatively better than the others, in accordance with the command of His Holiness the Point [i.e. the Bāb], glorious in his mention, who commanded...the authority shall return to the Witnesses of the Bayān...¹⁹⁴

In this way, the actual nature of Ḥājji Mīrzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī's succession to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal can now be positively ascertained from the analysis of even those accounts provided by the Bahā'īs.¹⁹⁵ In other words, it should probably now be recognized that

¹⁹¹ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8, 169-70. Māzandarānī's depicts him this way presumably due to his cited occupation as a preacher, a judge and a Witness of the Bayān. Māzandarānī goes on to say that all of Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Ṭārī's children converted to Bahā'ism but without providing any evidence for the claim.

¹⁹² For his biography, see *Elr* <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dawlatabadi-sayyed-yahya> (accessed September 30, 2017).

¹⁹³ (Tehran: intishārāt-i-ʿaṭṭār, 1362 solar/1982-4 CE).

¹⁹⁴ Translated by E.G. Browne in *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 312. The original, unedited handwritten Persian account by Riḍvān-ʿAlī (dated 11 July [Tamūz] 1912) to C.D. Cobham, esq., is found in CUL, Browne Collection, F.25(9), item 5, folios 267b-270b. It is quite surprising that Browne did not grasp the explicit allusion made by Riḍvān-ʿAlī from the Bāb in n3 of that chapter, referring to it as "...an obscure quotation doubtless from the Bayān, but I have not found it, and do not know the context," since it is from the same aforementioned will and testament of the Bāb discussed above here, with versions of the text existent in several of the very compilations of Bābī MSS he had acquired from Cyprus as well as Iran well before 1912, one transcription of it being in F.23 (BBF. 3), item 59, folio 175a-b, with a few others dispersed among the other volumes of the Cambridge Browne Bābī collection elsewhere. He had himself earlier quoted directly from it in 'Catalogue and Description of 27 Bābī Manuscripts' 1, JRAS (1892), 477-81, esp. 481.

¹⁹⁵ Asad'ullāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī *ṭārikh-i-zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8, 506.

Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī was specifically appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as a Witness of the Bayān, and not in any other capacity. Be that as it may, no textual or other documentary evidence from his own writings or that of his closest kin has ever come to light remotely suggesting that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal appointed a succeeding Mirror of the Bayān before his death in April 1912,¹⁹⁶ neither in the earlier appointment of Hādī Dawlatābādī nor of his son Yaḥyā.¹⁹⁷

That said, the status of Aḥmad Thamara (Miṣbāḥ al-Ḥukamā') (d. 1940-41), Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's grandson, still remains to be clarified because he does indeed appear to have been held in very high esteem by the Bayānīs throughout most of his adult life, and not merely because of his genealogy either. Unfortunately, at this time at least, there is no documentary evidence to shed further light on the matter, and the anecdotal accounts provided over this question are often vague and contradictory. Beyond him, however, we do know about Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī who died in the

¹⁹⁶ This also proves that the cryptic verses of the poem by Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāqir Kirmani (Sanī' al-Aṭabā') in his correspondence with Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Kirmani in which he claims Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's aforementioned grandson Miṣbāḥ al-Ḥukamā' as Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's nominated spiritual successor to be in fact the author's own fanciful speculation on the matter and so lacking in foundation, in CUL, Browne Collection, F.25(9), item 2, folio 216b, and mentioned in R.A. Nicholson *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. Belonging to the Late E.G. Browne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 64. According to Siyyid Miqdād Nabavi-Razavi (email, 2015) --who has conducted extensive interviews with the Bayānīs of Iran (especially among their older generation still alive) -- the abovementioned Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāqir Kirmani (Sanī' al-Aṭabā') later styled himself Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's successor as the second Mirror of the Bayān but apparently did not attract any followers among the Bayānīs. Other claimants to the mirrorhood of the Bayān included one 'Abd'ul-Ḥusayn Ṣadr al-Muḥaddithīn Isfahani (with the date and circumstances of his death in some dispute) and after him Majīd Zand Kirmani (who claimed to be the former's successor as the third Mirror of the Bayān; no date of death for him is currently available either). But the first did not attract any followers while the latter briefly attracted some but was apparently soon abandoned altogether. As well, a number of Kirmani Bayānīs for some time outright claimed Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī as the second Mirror of the Bayān. Yet while he himself was alive he categorically disabused any pretensions to the rank (ibid.) It should also be pointed out here that Moojan Momen's contention that Ṣubḥ-i-Azal had originally intended to appoint his own son Aḥmad Bahhāj (d. 1933) as his successor but did not do so as a consequence of a family dispute -- a contention for which he does not provide any source -- is baseless and so can be safely dismissed as unfounded, see his entry 'Yāḥyā, Mīrzā' in *The Bahā'ī Encyclopedia Project*, online http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/index.php?view=article&catid=37%3A Biography&id=71%3A Yahya-mirza&option=com_content&Itemid=74 (accessed November 1, 2017). Equally without merit is Momen's claim in 'The Cyprus Exiles' asserting that Aḥmad Bahhāj converted to Bahāism, online https://bahai-library.com/momen_cyprus_exiles (accessed November 1, 2017). Evidence proving the groundless nature of this latter claim -- and one originating posthumously first with Shoghi Effendi in his *God Passes By*, ibid., and later in 1967 with Lady Blomfield (d. 1939) in her *The Chosen Highway* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1967), 237-8 -- can be easily demonstrated on the basis of several existent, privately held MSS of the works of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal that were copied in the hand of Aḥmad Bahhāj well after the timeline in which the Bahā'īs allege he made his purported conversion. Furthermore, according to his relative Jalāl Azal, before his public apostasy from Bahāism and during the period while he was still a leading Bahā'ī *muballigh* (proselytizer) living in Palestine, 'Abd'ul-Ḥusayn Āyatī Āvāriḥ (d. 1953-4) had approached Aḥmad Bahhāj on several occasions upon the behest of first 'Abd'ul-Bahā' and then later Shoghi Effendi urging the latter to pen an open denunciation of his father, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, to which attempts Aḥmad Bahhāj had unequivocally refused, see Jalāl Azal *The Religion of the Bayān and the Claims of the Bahā'īs*, 170. Jalāl Azal goes on to say that "...Shoghi Effendi's statement in *God Passes By*, P.233 that he [i.e. Aḥmad Bahhāj] 'expressed repentance, asked for forgiveness, was graciously accepted by him [i.e. Sir Abbas Effendi] and remained till the hour of his death, a loyal follower of the [Bahā'ī] faith', is devoid of historical foundation..." (ibid.)

¹⁹⁷ This information now revises earlier comments made by Azal in 'Invoking the Seven Worlds', 25.

early 1960s and who was, as mentioned above, appointed to the role of Witness by Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī.¹⁹⁸ Before his death, however, Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī entrusted the role to an individual who later turned out to have been neither serious nor sincere in his purported conversion to the religion of the Bayān, later emerging that this person entrusted by Ibrāhīmī had initially made contact with (and then remained among) the Bayānīs under largely dubious pretexts.¹⁹⁹ At the present time there are no existing witnesses nor of any other kind of charismatic authority -- nor any kind of formal organization, for that matter. So much so that in one recent interview given to a Turkish news organization, one of descendents of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal has gone on record claiming that “the Azalī religion is no longer a living religion.”²⁰⁰ While the current Bayānī membership may be quite small in terms of actual numbers, this characterization of the situation may not be as dire as all that either, since there do in fact still exist small clusters of practicing Bayānīs in Iran and elsewhere. The existence of the website Bayanic.com since 2004 and its continued activity is clear evidence to that end.

As a conclusion, the untenable nature of the term *Azalī* should now be addressed in brief. Although the terms ‘Azalī’ and ‘Azalī Bābī’ have gained widespread currency since the late nineteenth century, they are nevertheless inaccurate terms originally popularized in the literature from the post-1892 period onward (and then uncritically repeated ever since), first chiefly by E.G. Browne in Western print as a neutral term of identification distinguishing the two rival Bābī groups and then independently by the Bahā’īs as a sectarian slur.²⁰¹ Per the Bāb’s own writings, as well as the continual insistence of this community itself, the proper term of designation should be *Bayānī*, i.e. in reference to the central proof-text of this creed, namely, the *Bayān* (exposition, enumeration, manifestation). The terms “Azalī” and “Azalī Bābī” held no currency even under the founder of the Bahā’ī faith himself, and there is no MSS or other textual evidence proving otherwise prior to the late nineteenth century when E.G. Browne and the Bahā’īs first began popularizing it. In fact in his *kitāb-i-aqdas* (Most Holy Book)²⁰² Bahā’ullāh himself plainly refers to this community as the “*ahl al-bayān*” (people of the Bayān) and elsewhere in its plural form in Persian as “*bayānīyān*,”

¹⁹⁸ Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi (Skype, 2016).

¹⁹⁹ Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi (Skype, 2016). According to Siyyid Miqdad Nabavi-Razavi this person was still alive up until only a few years ago and dropped out of all Bayānī related activities during the 1960s not long after Ibrāhīmī’s death. Be that as it may, this also means that ever since the death of Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī in 1963 the role of the witnesses of the Bayān has effectively lapsed.

²⁰⁰ ‘Kıbrıs’ın yaşayan son Ezelileri’ <http://www.havadiskibris.com/kibrisin-yasayan-son-ezelileri/> (accessed October 23, 2017).

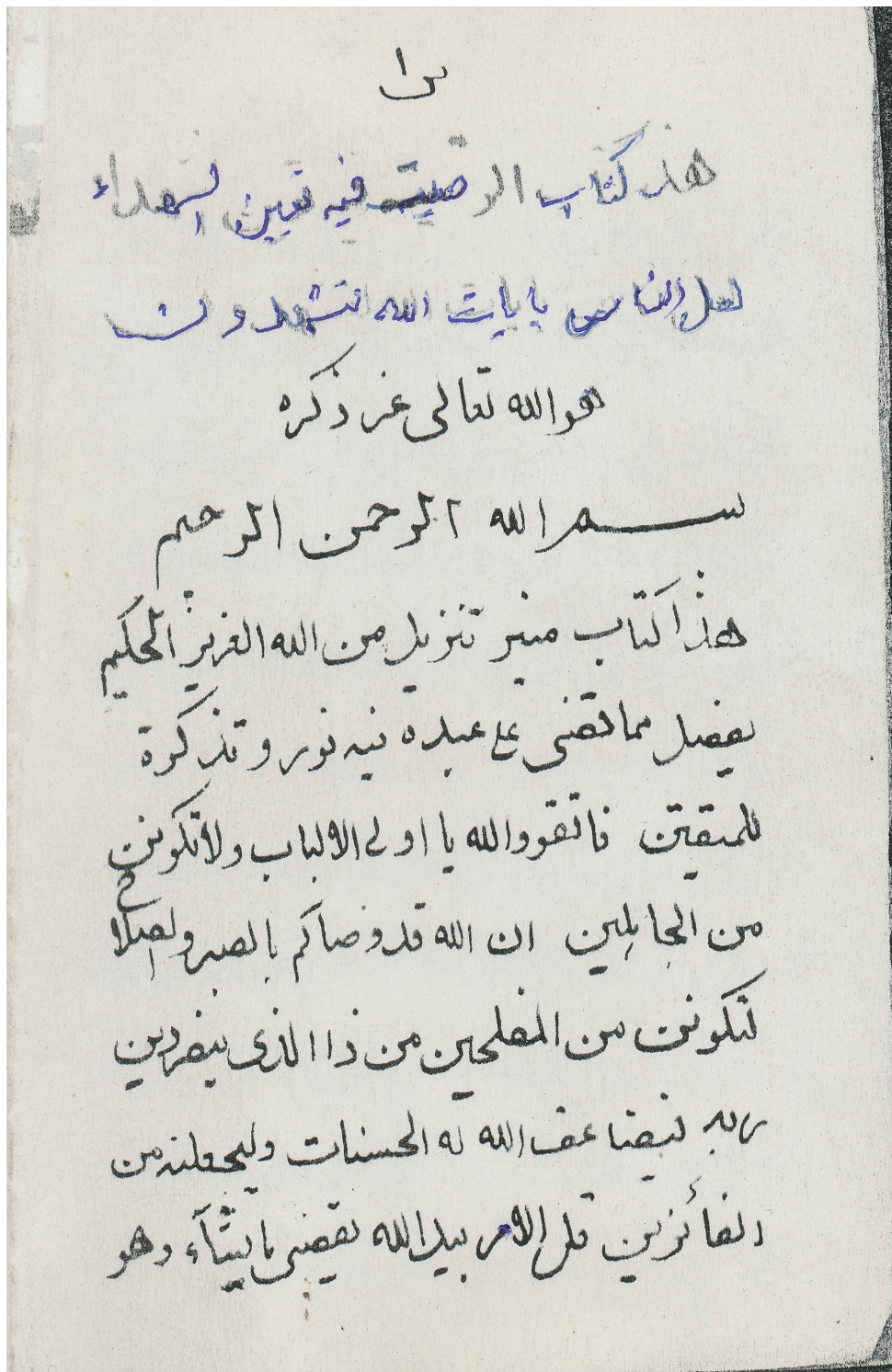
²⁰¹ Included among such derisive terms is the closely related and extremely pejorative “*Yaḥyā’ī*” and its plural “*Yaḥyā’īyān*” which was coined and extensively used in his writings by ‘Abd’ul-Bahā’. What is particularly disparaging about it is because it dismisses the entire Bayānī creed as being merely a cult of personality around Ṣubḥ-i-Azal: a rather quaint (albeit implied) slur by the Bahā’ī patriarch to be making in light of the fact that the very name of the creed which he headed was derived from the first part of his own father’s epithet (i.e. *bahā’*).

²⁰² (Wilmette: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust and Southgate Publishers, 1992).

which is to say, Bayānīs. Moreover, and this is the crucial point, Bahā'ullāh does not refer to the Bayānīs as “Azalīs” even in his late 1867 *kitāb-i-badī*, which was his response to his Bayānī detractors. If it be pointed out that E.G. Browne uses the term ‘Azalī’ (or, rather, in its turkified pronunciation of “Ezelī”) as early as in *A Year Amongst the Persians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893)²⁰³ -- being the travelogue of his journey to Iran during 1887-8 -- this still does not prove any widespread currency to the term in an earlier period prior to when Browne first began popularizing the term in Western print; nor, for that matter, is there the slightest hint or indication in the text of Browne’s travelogue that those Bayānīs he met with during his stay in Iran (or in Cyprus, for that matter) actually identified themselves with the term. Browne labelled them with it while the Bahā'īs (as well as some Muslim detractors) gave it further currency independently of Browne; but the Bayānīs never labelled themselves with this term. Furthermore, in no piece of writing authored by him does *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* ever once refer to the creed which he headed as ‘Azalī’ or ‘Azalī Bābism’, nor for that matter did any of the witnesses of the Bayān either. Instead *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* always refers in his writings to the “Bayān” and “the people of the Bayān” but never ‘Azalī’, let alone ‘Azalī Bābism’. As such if the Bahā'īs are accorded the term by which they themselves identify their creed then it is only proper for the scholarship at least to begin accurately reflecting the same in the case of the Bayānīs as well.

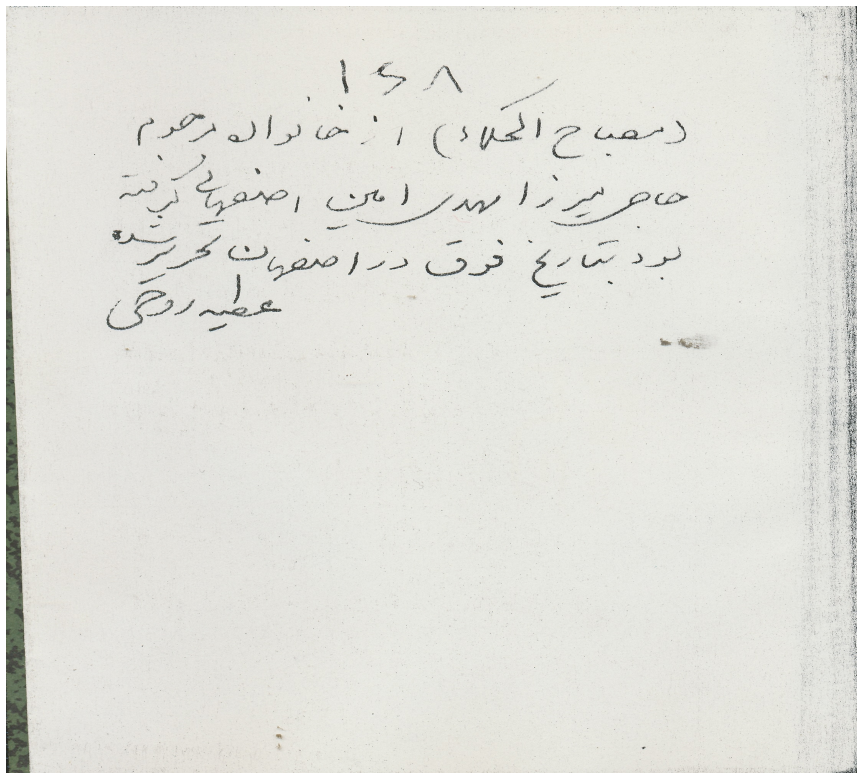
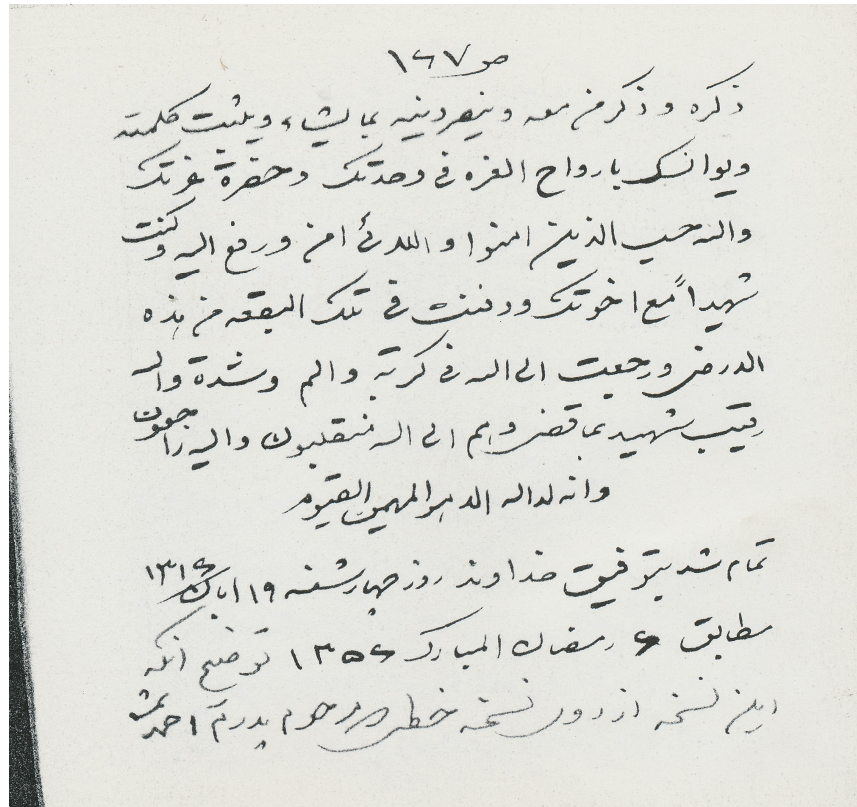
²⁰³ It would appear that the very first public usage of this term by E.G. Browne occurs in his “The Bábīs of Persia. I: Sketch of Their History, and Personal Experiences among Them,” being the first of two journal monographs penned shortly after his return to England from Ottoman Turkey and Qājār Iran. That said, it is instructive that neither of the French equivalents to “Azalī” or “Azalī Bābism” occur anywhere in the Comte de Gobineau’s *Les religions et les philosophies dans l’asie centrale* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1st edition, 1865), online https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_Y7fKC1xhbX0C (accessed March 16, 2018), since this was the very work that initially sparked E.G. Browne’s interest in the whole subject of Bābism to begin with as well as that of other Western intellectuals of the period.

Figure 1



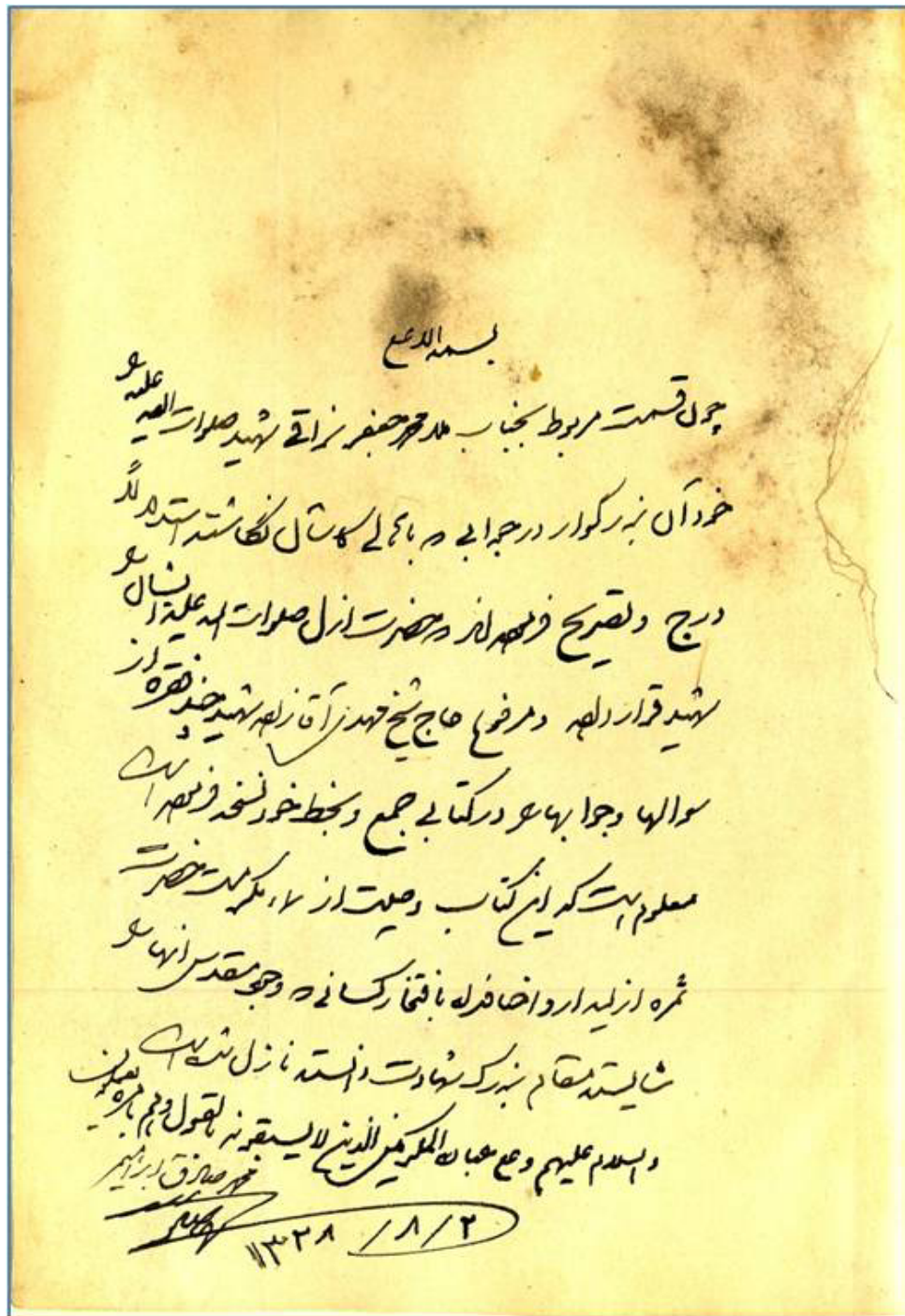
(folio 1a; paginated at 1) MS (1) of Şubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* with incipit (private collection, Iran).

Figures 2 & 3



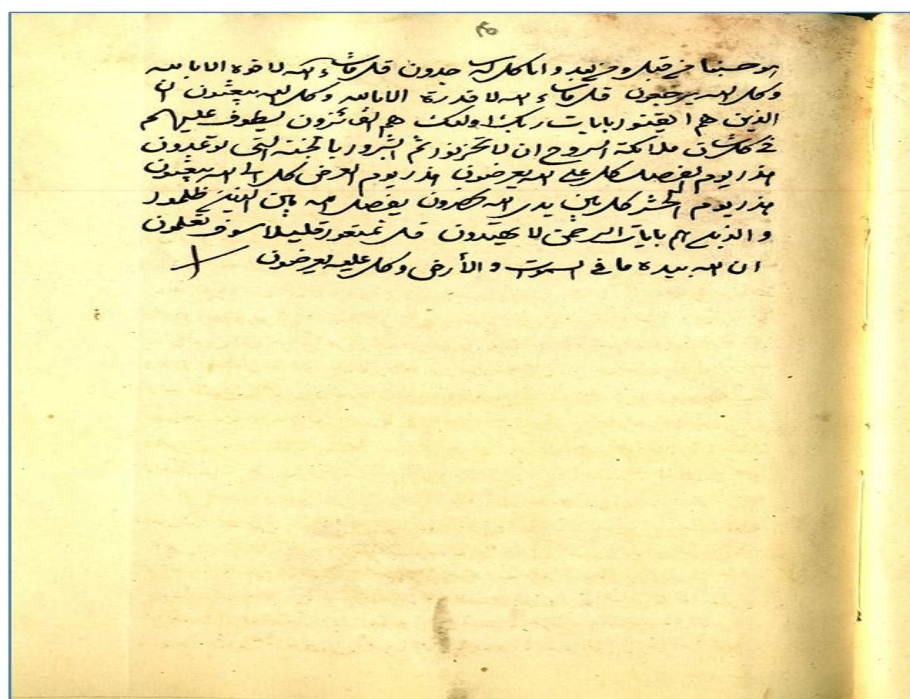
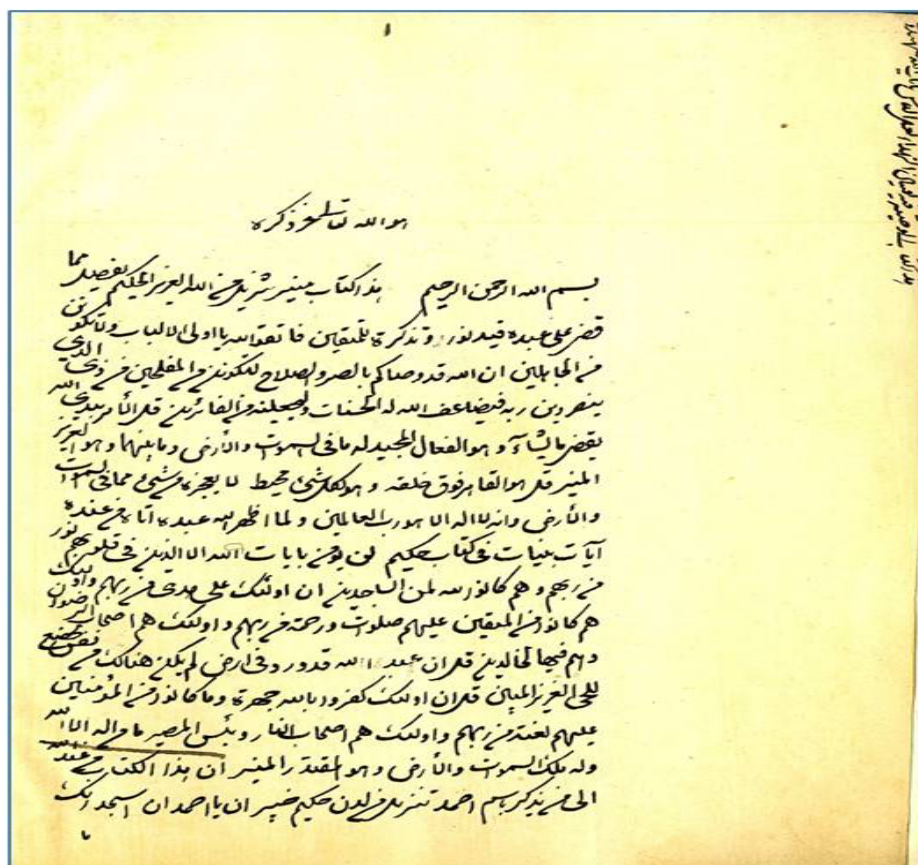
(folios 87a-b; paginated 167 and 168) MS (1) of Şubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* with the colophon of Aḥmad Thamariḥ (Misbāḥ al-Ḥukamā') and the note by his daughter 'Atīyah Rūḥī following the date. Dated 19th of Ābān 1316 solar (8 October 1937), corresponding to the sixth of Ramaḍān 1356 AH (private collection, Iran).

Figure 4



(folio 1a) MS (2) of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* with introductory note and colophon of its copyist, Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī (d. 1963). Dated: 2nd of Ābān 1328 solar (24 October 1949) (private collection, Iran). On lines 1-4 (below the benediction) the notice clearly states that in a reply to an inquiry from the Bābīs of Kāshān, Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī had apprised his Kāshānī correspondents that he had been appointed by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal as the Witness of the Bayān for that town.

Figures 5 & 6



(**folio 2a, paginated at 1; and folio 2b, paginated at 40**) **MS** (2) with *incipit* to Şubḥ-i-Azal's *kitāb al-waṣīya* (vertically on the right-hand margin) and the **MS**'s conclusion (private collection, Iran).